







PROCESSION

BROADWAY EDITION

PROCESSION

by

FANNIE HURST

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CONTENTS

THE LEFT HAND OF GOD	1
THE THIRD HUSBAND	47
THE YOUNG PRINCE	104
THE HOSSIE-FROSSIE	174
GIVE THIS LITTLE GIRL A HAND	229



PROCESSION

The Left Hand of God

ONCE Celia Rivers read in a newspaper of an experiment in animal vivisection which fascinated even while it smote her with pity.

A window had been cut into the flank of a beast of the field, so that the unhappy creature's organic processes were apparent to the eye of the beholder in the experimental laboratory. Celia would have liked to cut such a figurative window into the soul of Howard West, who was a "taster" in the Alpha Tea Company, where she was one of four assistants to a head bookkeeper.

The three other assistants twitted a great deal about Howard, but in the piqued fashion of women who feel themselves overlooked.

"M-m! Wonder who knitted his lordship the fuchsia tie he's wearing this morning?"

Celia wondered, too. But silently. And passionately. And almost prayed it was a store weave.

The girls in the office were constantly curling their lips over Howard and imitating his manner of walking. Or lowering their lids three-quarters,

to give idea of what they considered his supercilious trance, at least so far as they were concerned.

It is probable that at heart they were every one of them smitten with him.

It is certain Celia Rivers was.

She made no pretense about it to herself. Outwardly, except by her conspicuous silence when office twittering about him took place, there were at least twenty months when they continued to pass each other three and four and five times a week with scarcely more than the frigid formalities of the time-of-day between them.

As Celia said later, and unashamedly, it must have been the yearning arms of her spirit reaching out to him that finally made themselves felt to him.

He stood aside one day to permit her to go through a doorway that he was entering, as she was leaving, and there took place one of those teetering performances between two people, each stepping the same direction to let the other pass.

It was a little dance into one another's hearts.

For the first time, Howard, who *did* seem to wear his lids down over his eyes as if to enclose a

private vision that was dear to him, took in the clear pink-and-brown prettiness that was Celia's. She was a cool, direct sort of a mountain-stream of a girl, whose hair, which she wore parted and in a nice bun low on her neck, was the color of a polished chestnut. Her cheeks had high natural color and her eyes were the mountain stream. You felt about them the quality of flowing water that had been distilled at the source of a clean heart.

At any rate, that was the way Howard vaguely felt about her when he first came into his awareness of her the day they stood teetering each for the other to pass.

Even then, matters stood still for at least another fortnight. Except that Celia, when she went home evenings to the small but quite dainty little boarding-house room, which her ingenuity, ever so slightly aided and abetted by purse, had devised, carried the memory of the two nice, dreamy eyes of Howard West as the lids had lifted back and they had seemed to come awake that day of the teetering in the doorway.

A thousand things she wondered about him as she lay in her bed. When you coupled tea-tasting with Howard, there became something esoteric about it. To the hundred of employees at the

Alpha, tea was just something to be reckoned in bales and pounds and blends. The chief book-keeper and his assistants, the managers, the salesmen, credit men, foremen, shipping clerks, even the officials of the company, dealt in the merchandise of tea.

Howard, on the other hand, closeted in his small room with the rows of noseless pots of equal cubic capacity, the pretty teacups, the sand-glass of brown running stripe and the constant hum of boiling water, seemed a sort of genii of the leaves. Breath of the acacia hovered in the room where he moved among the softly-steaming pots. The orange and flowery Pekoes, the ropy Souchongs, and the Congous yielded him what must have been sly secrets on their scented breaths. Because to Celia, when she peeped in through the door, Howard's face, as he inhaled and tasted, could flatten into a mask, like a curiously ecstatic mandarin, tasting passion of a precious sort.

When Celia entered in her book, twenty-one pounds of Paklin to J. S. Nicholson, Wholesale Grocery Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota, or a special shipment of Caper, Gunpowder, scented Orange Pekoe, or Young Hyson to Harley's of

Chicago, there it was, merchandise pure and simple.

When Howard, on the other hand, moved among the hot breaths of his blends and across his pale face, that somehow looked closed because the lids were low, there swept that look of a mandarin in ecstasy, it was because to him, off the long crinkled leaves of a tea from Formosa that Celia merely entered as "Oolong," there boiled up the hesitant fragrance of the aselica, or the peach-flavored vision of a tea-garden at South Sylhet.

Thinking of him hours-on-end in the solitude of her little room in the boarding-house, Celia, after her fashion, sensed all this.

It must have been the bond that drew the matter-of-fact little assistant bookkeeper, who had cool, clear eyes and wore dark-blue frocks with sheer collars and cuffs to business, and this strangely dreamy youth, the tea-taster, together.

Life was a matter of "p's" and "q's" to her, to be carefully minded. It should have been to him. But was not. Never could be. Some one would always be minding them for him. Celia wanted to be the one. She knew many of his habits. From observation. From hearsay. From a carping sort of anxiety about him, that made her pry.

He lived in a Y. M. C. A. When the three assistant bookkeepers, who had that overlooked feeling, heard this, they twittered and tittered. Celia didn't. She knew that in Y. M. C. A.'s the beds were clean. Howard would like fresh linen. And there were reading-room tables covered with magazines. He would like the travel and some of the adventure ones. And one could be more alone there, in a crowd, than in the terrible, focused unprivacy of a boarding-house.

Two of his habits she knew from observation. He kept apples and library books in the locker he shared with the chief bookkeeper, and spent most of his noon hours, munching and reading.

The other habit she stumbled across accidentally.

Near her boarding-house in West Sixty-fifth Street was an entrance to Central Park. Often, on pleasant evenings, she sat there through the exciting city dusks, watching one Himalaya Mountain of a building after another light up.

One evening, she saw Howard come out of a riding-academy in Sixty-fifth Street, leading a handsome, sand-colored wolf-hound by a short, strong leash. A high-stepping, heavy-shouldered fellow with a slim, scenting snout and a down-

tail. They almost brushed her as they passed, and it seemed to Celia that she could feel her teeth beat, so closely her heart rode up behind them.

That was about one week after they had met eye to eye and teetered in the doorway. With pricks of self-loathing out over her, Celia, who, if anything, was self-effacing to a degree that was unreasonable, found her way to that same bench evening after evening, her throat full of heart-beat as, with unfailing regularity, the figure of the man and the wolf-hound came in sight.

Then, without any preparation for it, so that when it happened Celia felt an actual stab in her side of surprise, his name hopped off her lips as he passed.

His new awareness of her, dating back to the few days before, must have been something more finite than he realized because, most diffident of youths himself, up shot his eyelids with pleasure as he recognized her there in the twilight that was draped around her like purplish portières.

That was the beginning.

Every evening, the three of them, the man, the dog, and the girl, met at that bench and walked in the thickening hour between seven and eight.

It was the time of the day the man held in-

violate for his dog. And now, here was Celia, walking into it, to boot. To his surprise, he welcomed the intrusion.

In bad weather, they met under the white arc light in the entrance of the riding-academy where Howard boarded his dog with a horse-trainer who did it as a special favor.

But usually, that autumn, the evenings were spiced and clear. It seemed to Celia, that sometimes the three of them fairly bobbed through the buoyant ether. Starful, loveful ether, that carried them along like flakes before a wind.

There was so much to know about Howard. New, undreamed-of quirks to his nature that sometimes, because they were so elusive, made her want to cry of a sense of his remoteness to the world in which he dwelt. And then the excitement of verifying all the things about him she had known with her heart: That the solitude of being in a crowd was precious to him; that the smell and taste of wine-sap apples over a book of verse or of travel, were as rifle and tobacco-pouch to him; that the aromas of teas were so many magic-carpets to him, wafting him from Java to Formosa, to Ceylon, to Monnabarrie, to Jamaica, to the Fiji Island of Tavuni, to Vanua Levu, to the

Caucus towns of Batoum, Chackra, Salibauri, and Kaprshun.

The names he had to fill in for her. They were just so many blank places in her vision.

Howard loved the blend of his teas with a poet's passion for the blend of words. Even when it cut her with an unnamable fear to have him relate his dreams to have "The Alpha Company" send him to the land of Assam Pekoes, Indian Dusts or the peach-sweet ceremonial Yencha teas of Japan, it thrilled her.

Ah no, here was no mere dealer in the merchandise of tea.

Howard was a poet with the flanges of his sensitive nose. Howard was an epicure along whose palate flowed aromatic secrets.

He had been born in an inland town called Ideola, and had never set foot on anything of greater sea-going intention than a Staten Island ferry, but Howard, with his sense of taste and his sense of smell, knew embroidered beauties of the Orient that set Celia to tingling like a bell.

Known to Howard was a tea grown in Bengal which "in flush," caused the women who gathered it to successfully bear child in four months. There was a certain kind of "Darjeelings," secret,

subtle, and scarcely obtainable, two cupfuls of which were said to wash the eyes clear enough for second sight.

All this to Celia, to whom, heretofore, teas were so much merchandise to be entered into her books something like this:

No. 1. Indian	Cost \$3.25
No. 2. "	" 3.45
No. 3. Brick	" 1.55
No. 4. China	" 2.00
No. 5. Broken Pekoes	" .95
No. 6. Orange Pekoes	" .95
No. 7. Fannings	" 1.95
No. 8. Indian	To be matched.

Small wonder that these autumn nights of their wooing were like a crystal ball that enclosed them.

The new passion for Celia Rivers, where before there had only been his solitary love for his dog, flowed swiftly, surely, and rightly into Howard's life.

The thirtieth of the nights of the girl, the man, and the dog, along with the trainer who had kennelled Pekoe, for witness, they were married in a little church around the corner that was called "The Little Church Around the Corner."

If to know a person like a book is to know the secret places of the heart, the hidden yearnings, the flutterings of desire, then so Celia knew Howard.

Even at those portals of his imagination where she could not enter, there she paused with perhaps the finest quality of her understanding of him. It was as if she could see the trailing clouds swing after him like doors and yet herself wait satisfiedly outside.

If ever a man walked into the flowery kingdom of a woman's love, that man was Howard. And he realized it. He was like a person with nipped fingers who could never get them close enough to the flame, once he had found its warmth. And Celia threw out her light, her luminosity, with a prodigality that sometimes abashed him. And then what he did was to hover more closely.

She found them a home in the country. Dear knows how she managed it because right off they were obliged to begin with the fallacious experiment of two attempting to live as cheaply as one. But with Celia resigning her position, that was precisely what they had to accomplish, and that on a salary that had barely sufficed for the Y. M.

C. A. régime and the additional luxury of boarding Pekoe at the riding-academy.

The way she managed was thus:

There was no use apartment-hunting in town. Celia realized that to continue to shut Howard up in the kind of rooms he could afford was to continue to shut up his spirit.

There was no use house-hunting in a suburb. Celia realized that, too, unless she were willing to be reconciled to Howard in one of the papery bungalow-rows that stripe acres of Long Island "development."

They found a barn on a hillside of an orchard in Connecticut and rented it for ten dollars a month. It was one hour and four minutes by train from New York, and yet it had an isolation that enchanted them. Even the farmhouse to which the barn had once stood adjacent had long since burned. Their next-door neighbor was a truck-gardener, a good mile distant. There was an old bucket-well on the place. A tool-house, which was later to be reconstructed into a dog-house for Pekoe, and the barn itself had fine old rafters, a dry, wooden flooring, two partitions on the first floor and three up in what had once been the hayloft.

When they moved out with about six sticks of furniture, Pekoe, two trunks, and a wash-basket of dishes and kitchenware, the pretty orchard that surrounded them was all laid out in a light snow, so that the very first day, as she hammered away, dragged, even pioneered with an ax, Celia could see Howard's footsteps as they wound to the train, stretch before her very eyes and freeze into dear, ruddy places, the shape of his shoes.

She liked, every so often, to run to the window and look out at them. Pekoe, too, who was wild with the joy of his release from the kennel, bounded around them, sniffing.

As Howard put it to her in the beautiful way he had of seeming to feel things, that winter sped into spring with the whiz of a silver arrow; a spring that laid the orchard all out in white once more. But this time, the heart-bursting white of apple and peach blossoms.

Just to behold Howard's face when he woke mornings in a room where an apple tree leaned in at the window, and sitting up, sniffed all this loveliness, was to realize to the fullest how right she had been in her conviction that in beauty of surroundings lay his deepest satisfaction.

Beauty. He worked like a Trojan at the put-

tery things about the house. It was Celia who plastered the walls. It was Howard who pasted on the strips of pale, old-fashioned Watteau wallpaper, which he found in a shop under a bridge in lower New York.

It was Celia who laid out a little garden-walk of flagstones that led to a bit of stream that capered through the place. It was Howard who planted a flowery moss, known as portulaca, between the stones, that when it bloomed, looked as if he had sown colored stars among the rocks.

It was Celia, with her hands, built and hammered a thatched roof on to the tool-house for Pekoe.

It was Howard who painted it mauve, with a green trim to match the glorified barn.

It was spring, all right, within that house and without.

And to Celia's delight, Howard was inspired to an indoor pastime that was as related to those vernal months as measles is to childhood.

He wrote her a sonnet. Fourteen lines, which, as he put it, went Shakespeare one better, and ended in a kiss to each of her eyebrows.

Celia could not join in his self-deprecatory laughter about it. She cried a little with her lips

against his eyelids that he seemed to keep drooped, sometimes even against her, as if to enclose the vision.

That was the night she told him that a child was to be born.

After that, she thought she had never really known him before. He would have tied her shoes for her, carried her up and down the steep ladder-stairs of their home, and once she caught him about to plunge his hands into dish-water, when she seemed pale and a little worn after their meal.

His long, white, immaculate hands that she loved.

He managed, during these months of their absurd income, to bring her home a chipped majolica vase that had loveliness left, for which he had browsed around in a junk shop one noon hour, or some white-enamel paint for a crib they were building of a barrel sliced lengthwise, and once he came bearing three little imitation pearls, that he thought had something of the mysterious flesh-luster, so that she might sew them down the back of a dress for a baby.

She thought about that through the long days as she worked. His fine eye would care for even

the beauty of the three tiny buttons down the back of an infant's dress!

It gave you a glow at your own heart all right, keeping life beautiful for a man like that.

It made even the days before the coming of the ordeal of birth less apprehensive.

Against her almost inevitable depressions and any possible apprehensions, Howard, understanding and sensitive, trained even their dog, Pekoe. No foot was permitted to enter that orchard without the master's or the mistress's word of assurance that the intruder was welcome.

Pekoe had not been trained for naught. Once a tramp ventured to prowl by night, and before anyone in the house had even heard the footsteps, the stranger had been ousted, leaving behind a strip of coat-sleeve that Pekoe came proudly bearing into the house.

It made of isolation a feathered nest. Howard always maintained that of the two of them, he had the better of it, because the pang of leaving home in the morning was more than compensated by the joy of returning to it at night.

This Celia hotly contested and declared that the perfection of isolation was the long, speechless days that were waiting to be broken into by

the first yaps of Pekoe proclaiming his master's return.

And so, like children, they debated their respective happiness to the pennyweight.

Something happened then that performed the devilish paradox of contributing to their happiness, even while it subtracted.

One evening Howard bounded up their orchard-side at even more than his usual rapid clip. There was a tiny flow of unwonted color under his almond-white, almond-long cheeks.

"Something good and something bad has happened," he told her while he was still out of breath.

"Tell me the bad," she said with a woman's quick instinct for panic, and laid her hand to her heart, assurance surging over her immediately, however, with the realization that with Howard safe and sound before her, nothing really evil could befall.

"They want to send me to the Brahmaputra Valley, the Surma Valley, and to Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and then on down to Madras and Burma in southern India," said Howard all in one breath, reciting the alleged catastrophe with flames in his eyes that denied that ashes were on his lips.

At once Celia knew everything, but she let him tell it as you would a child who comes tearing home with a tale that clogs and sputters, because his lips are too slow at utterance.

"You see, they are the largest tea districts of India." As if she hadn't heard the names of all the places he was spluttering to her, recited yearningly time after time.

"I never dreamed that the Old Gentleman had me in mind for a reconnoitering trip like that. When he called me into his office, for a moment, dear, I felt pretty black. Walking-papers aren't unheard of. And then he sprung this on me. Just kind of want you to know it, sweetheart. They don't think so badly of me in the firm, now do they?"

"As if anyone could," she said, but her eyes were already yearning and bleeding with what they saw in the future.

"Wouldn't think of it, of course. Suppose if I weren't such a conceited ass at heart, I would never have told you a word of it. It's just a low-down mean desire to boom my own stock in your eyes."

"As if it could be any higher than it already is!"

"I think I've told you, dear, about Darjeelings. The plantations there are so fragrant, they tell me, that a fellow is half drunk all the time. You see, here's the way the firm looks at it. The public is getting tired of blackness and bitterness in tea being passed off on them. There is more flavor of white acacia in the one-hundred-and-twelve teaspoonfuls that go to make a pound of some of the Darjeelings than— Sweet, you're not listening."

Celia wasn't. In her heart, she was bidding him farewell.

Be it said for Howard that with every inch of his stature he conscientiously set himself against going.

"But Boy, it is the opportunity of the copy-books, knocking at a young man's door."

"That's poppycock. It knocks as often as lightning strikes twice. And everybody, except compilers of copy-books, knows that lightning is the very devil for striking twice in the same place."

"Howard, I want you to go to Burma and bring me back a fan of ivory-and-sandalwood."

"I'll take you to Burma some day," he said, but his eyes were dim with a yearning denied. "Fan-out-of-ivory-and-sandalwood."

She had teased him wisely, because his nostrils flared a little as if to the scent of the sandalwood.

"If you don't go, Howard," she told him after three nights of the pleading, "I will go down into the pain of bearing our child filled with the thought that its father is a prisoner."

"Why, Celia," he said and held her closely, "what a horrible idea! I won't leave you at this time. I can't. I shouldn't ——"

"If you do go, Howard," she said, and fixed him with her clear eyes, "I shall go down into the beauty and pain of bearing our child, filled with the joy of knowing that its father has sailed away and will come back to his little ——"

"Daughter ——"

". . . his little daughter, enriched in mind and in spirit. And in purse, too. We need the additional income, Howard, that the raise in salary will bring. I want you to go, sweetheart."

"If only I knew," he said on the first moment of capitulation, and pouring his glance into hers as if he might read there the bare truth stripped of words—"if only I knew sweetheart, what you really want."

"I want you to go," she said, and what she did not say behind the barricade of mere words was,

I w a n t - y o u - t o - g o - b e c a u s e - I - k n o w - t h a t - i s - t h e - o n l y - w a y - I - c a n - h o l d - y o u .

And yet, it was many a day before he did completely capitulate.

After all, their nearest neighbor was a good three-quarters of a mile away.

At that she snapped her fingers and reminded him that to pioneer women like her grandmother, who had migrated to Dakota in a covered wagon, such propinquity would have been urban. Did she not have a telephone under her very fingers? The doctor and the hospital in New York were all arranged for in advance, so that well before the actual hour arrived she would be safely ensconced there.

But afterward?

Afterward! Why, what city-dweller could hope to be as safe as Celia and her baby would be behind the superb barricade of Pekoe? No foot dared to enter the sanctum of even the edge of their orchard without assent from one or the other of the only two masters he recognized.

What burglar or intruder who manages to loot many a city home could break past the barricade of Pekoe?

It was on this last unassailable argument that

Howard's tottering system of defense crashed down.

Brahmaputra, Surmah, Jalpaiguri, Madras, Burma. Ivory apes and peacocks. Fans of sandalwood and ivory. Tea caravans in the streets of Calcutta. Wild tea-trees in bloom. Rose-colored tea-flowers in Assam. Assam under moonlight.

Howard wanted to go. Howard was on fire to go. And the pain of it was that even as he wanted to go, Howard wanted not to go.

It was Celia who saw to the last detail of the decision. Every button on his garments was tightened with the firm purpose of her lips as she stitched.

Howard was ready for the trip with a precision that was regimental. His clothing was packed that way. His needs anticipated.

One night in a bungalow on a plantation in Chota Nagpur, he came across a little button-hook caught in the groove of one of his shirt-cuffs.

He had thought it was the only thing she had forgotten. He had been grateful to her for the omission, because it seemed to flaw her in a dear sort of a way and humanize her perfection. And

now, here it was, bobbing up. He cried a little when he found it.

By this time he had gazed at the Taj Mahal under moonlight, had seen beggars pick their scabs for coins, had heard the soft twitter of Ceylonese women at the withering of tea, and swapped tea-lore with merchants out of Asiatic Turkey, Kashmir, and Persia.

By this time, he knew that the world was a whole honeycomb of stark-fact and stark-beauty and that he had never before been out of his single cell. The salve of the East was like a coating of tallow over his senses and over his body.

And yet, the sight of that button-hook caught in the slit of his cuff was something more poignant than the fragrance, or the reek, or the squalor, or the mystery, or the stock-still kind of intensity of the East. Howard was homesick. Celia-sick. Child-sick.

When his letters, bearing tales of strange beauties and even stranger horrors all mixed up with his yearnings and nostalgia and the really lovely, poetic patine that never failed to gloss his simplest moods, arrived to Celia, the nostalgia parts, which a six-month before would have been as in-

describably sweet as the pink tea-blossoms he described, now struck dread and terror to her heart.

Sometimes, if a letter arrived as she sat beside the crib of her child, or pattered among her little garments which she kept immaculate, she postponed reading it and tucked the envelope hastily into the pocket of the large white bungalow aprons she wore when she bathed her baby. For fear. For fear of that very note of nostalgia or impatience to return, which would once have been dear to her.

There was another note in those letters she dreaded so that the mere sight of Pekoe coming up from the mail-box with a foreign envelope between his teeth was sufficient to cause her to break out into simultaneous gooseflesh and cold sweat.

Howard's curiosity about his daughter. He wanted a sample of her hair. He wanted the precise color of her eyes, described in words that he alone would have been capable of. He wanted her length by the tape-measure and her weight by baby-scales. He begged for descriptions. Word pictures.

Poor Celia. The sample of hair could be managed. It was a pretty tan. And the color of her

eyes. Gray, most of the time, or rather a creamy agate, with a milkiness that varied. Her weight by baby-scale would have bothered him. She had been a six-pound baby. Had gained rapidly in length but not in flesh.

In fact, when Howard's daughter was eight months old, she—well, Howard's poor little wisp of a daughter had not, as the nurse had tried mercifully to explain it to Celia, when the horror first began to dawn upon her, come through the ordeal of birth quite successfully. A bit of God's wastage had been washed into life. A blighted flower, as it happens in His garden of trillions.

Only why—why, Celia asked and asked herself in the tortured months that followed, need it have been *their* garden? Their baby? The bitter irony of that—their garden, where a shrine was up to beauty.

It was Howard's repeated requests for photographs that most of all appalled Celia. And there seemed no way she could lash herself to the point of screwing up the courage to write him the truth.

Some truths can wait.

This grotesque little flower on its broken stalk, that God had seen fit to cast into their garden,

was something she began presently to personally hold herself to account for. If Howard had chosen another mother for his child, this might not have happened. If she had not thrust herself before his notice; If ——

Hypothetical imaginings that crucified her.

Two or three times a week, every time a boat was in, Pekoe, who had learned to nozzle open the mail-box, now carried her in a letter. News of their child? What were her tricks? Was there a little fleck of topaz in her eyes? Agate-colored eyes sometimes had it. Howard was like a boy with his cap in the air.

Then Celia hit upon a ruse. However the sight of Celia's daughter awake, might torment and wring the heart out of her, in sleep, she seemed as lovely as the child of Howard would need to be.

In sleep, the long, thin, nervous limbs relaxed and lay easy in their curves. The little face with the troubled, flickering lids, was at rest, and with the tan hair throwing it into shadows, she was any normal little girl. The long, shooting arms seemed to draw in and nest against the small bosom. In sleep, Celia's daughter, wild to the

touch when awake, would allow her to lift one of the hands and draw it softly along her cheek.

It was then, seated beside the crib, which had a high screen-barricade around it, that Celia wrote to Howard, describing their daughter. Sweet Innocence. Dear Delight. Flower-breath. Hyacinth.

It was in response to this last, that Howard cabled when the child was four weeks old.

Dearest letter to hand. Let us christen her Hyacinth.

For two hours after this message had reached her, Celia sat beside her sleeping child, afraid to stir, for fear she might yield to a dreadful impulse to laugh.

Christen her Hyacinth!

One lie begets another. It became easier after a time to write to Howard. The requests for the photographs were side-stepped by the difficulties of getting to town, now that the first snows were flying. One week, baby's weight did show a two-pound increase. There was news! Celia's pen dug into her paper, and because the lie had become easier now, Celia made the two pounds, three.

Once Howard sent her a cycle of four short

poems he had written. They were imagist in form and in manner. "One," "Two," "Three," and "Four," he called them separately, and bound them together, and hand-illuminated the word "Hyacinth" on the parchment cover. They were four short, sweet, passionate pleas for the beauty-of-mind of his daughter. The beauty-of-her-heart, the beauty-of-her-spirit, and the beauty-of-her-flesh.

When Celia read them, she cried with dry eyes, and all that day let her little girl rain the blows she delighted in hard upon her clogged bosom, which felt as if she had swallowed a wish-bone that had turned and got stuck there.

Due to Celia's insistence that he make the best of his opportunity, Howard prolonged his stay for two and then for three months beyond the time agreed upon.

And then one morning, even while a letter was lying on Celia's table waiting to be mailed to Howard, urging him to round out his ten months' sojourn into the year, a cablegram from Bombay was relayed to her by telephone, announcing that Howard was that day taking ship for home.

Such a spurt of terror shot through Celia that

when she hung up the receiver, she began walking rapidly about the room, picking up objects at random and replacing them without any awareness of what she was doing. Her child lay in its crib in one of the beatific attitudes that in sleep made it seem lovely, the head sort of tucked down toward the breast, and one arm, which in action was too long and bony and predatory, wreathed around its little neck.

Before the sleeping child, Celia dropped down, beside herself with the imminence of tragedy that was lowering about the head of the passenger from Bombay, who was probably at that moment shipping for home, and caught up her daughter frenziedly, invoking miracle in short, sharp cries.

"Be beautiful for him when he comes, little Hyacinth. Try to get beautiful. God, you make her beautiful for him. Make her little hands sweet hands, that don't dig and claw. Her little legs, lovely legs, that don't shinny and climb. My little girl. My poor little girl. My sweet little, poor little baby. That's right. Beat Mother. Scratch Mother. Claw her. Forgive her. Oh, my baby. Forgive Mother and get beautiful—for him. Never beat at him. Never claw him.

Never let him see you climb or clutch—the way you do. Get beautiful, my darling.”

Even Pekoe slunk away with his tail down before that. It was emotion, too naked. Too private. Celia, through her child, invoking God to lift his blight.

And now, in addition to the terror, there was remorse. In thus having shielded Howard, she was now about to flagellate him twice. If she had struck quick and sure, the very day the nurse had tried to be merciful to her, the blow of their catastrophe would have fallen by cablegram, and then the structure of his happiness would not have gone on mounting to the deceits she had kept piling upon him.

The child that Celia had presented in word-pictures to Howard, was the sweet and normal little one that Hyacinth, in sleep, could seem to be. That Hyacinth, awake, danced through the pages of the letters which Howard kept bound together with a rubber band in the top tray of his traveling-bag. A gray-eyed youngster with flecks of topaz to them and tan hair and dimpled hands.

Actually, the hands of Celia's baby were a constant terror to her. The fingers were so long and

quick to grasp. No vase, no toy, seemed immune to her destructibility.

All the transgressions of those agile, almost prehensile little fingers notwithstanding, Celia kept them covered with her fierce, indulgent kisses. Her sense that the guilt lay on her, grew as the child grew.

Meanwhile, the days passed and on the seas, a ship was carrying home a poet who had written his first short cycle of four songs under the spell of a moon-drenched tea-garden in Sephinguri, and addressed them to his daughter Hyacinth.

The altruistic hedonism of his later work had not manifested itself at this time, nor the sense of sweeping antiquity of Eastern culture that was to saturate his subsequent writing with the flavor of Oriental tradition.

There were more sheafs of just short, fragile, and elusive bits of lyrical writing addressed to his daughter, scattered in among his collars and cuffs.

To Hyacinth.

The day before the return of the year-gone traveler, blessedly, out of the chaos and the dread, there came to Celia the relief of decision.

Her house was in order. The little glorified

barn was a home now, set in completion among the pear and peach and apple trees. White curtains with fluted ruffles were looped back from every window. There was a tiny breakfast-alcove, built on by Celia, and yellow-painted furniture, the color of sunlight, built and painted by Celia, and in hers and Howard's room, a new chiffonier, with sliding-drawers for shirts and the full length to hang five suits of men's clothing, built and stained by Celia.

The home to which Howard was returning still lacked the modern conveniences of electric light and water, but there was a contraption, built and painted by Celia, in an old spring-house, that she painted mauve with the same green trim of the main building. It was now Howard's shower-bath. A barrel, mounted on davits and painted white-enamel, swung from the ceiling. A cord dangled, which you yanked after you had stepped on a sheet of tin below it, and a shower of spring-water came down in fine, biting needles.

The carpet of portulaca was blooming in full-blown stars in between the flag-stones as the day approached that Howard was to come home and the last surprise-touches in the form of a white picket-fence enclosing the kitchen-garden, and

a brass griffon of a knocker on the front door, had been completed.

It was this sense of her house in order, seemed to give Celia the power to corral her wits to order.

After all, what she had done, she had committed in the name of a compassion for Howard that was as wide as her love for him. If she had erred, she had erred in the name of both of those. What mattered it that for months her heart had hung in her body like a sack of meal and that terror and an unreasoning self-blame and sickness of soul had lived with her all through the days of dread against this return.

Her hour had come now. She must meet it.

God had seen fit to blight this house in an orchard; an orchard that was spread for Howard's return like a skirt-dance in spring.

Howard must face the blight within the orchard, as she had been forced to face it. The blighted little Hyacinth was there to love. Perhaps God, whose wisdom seemed terribly to pass her understanding, when she gazed sometimes at her little girl, would let there be another. . . .

And yet in her heart was the unnamable fear. She had seen Howard's face once, when a boy in the shipping-room of the Alpha Company had

come back to work after a siege of smallpox. It had been before they were married, and that evening, when they walked in the Park, he had kept rubbing his eyes as if to erase the vision of that pock-marked flesh from against his eyelids and yet could not seem to stop pitying or talking about it.

The memory of his face that evening hung in Celia's mind.

He had written her from Calcutta of the beggars who display their sores along the Indian roadsides. "Celia dear, it is not that I would turn my face from these wretches, it is just that the sight of them arouses in me a sickness that threatens to overwhelm even my compassion. . . ."

That letter had marked the beginning of her letters to him, urging, urging him to remain away as long as his firm could use him there.

She had never dared to look beyond that time. And now that time was here. There was no way out. She knew it quite simply now. What hours upon end, what days, what months of anguish it would have spared her to have realized it this simply before.

She would go to town to meet Howard's ship at the pier. And on the way home, in the train,

perhaps, there was this she could do for him to spare him some of the additional shock her cowardice was to let him in for. Tell him in dear, gentle words; all the compassionate, pity-full words she could muster—prepare him—oh, so gently—as gently as she would teach him to bear the pain ——

After that? Well? Well? After that? After that, God, help him not to hate me—and it.

She was glad that the day came clear. It made the not-so-simple matter of leaving home for the few hours, a little simpler.

She had done it before. Once, after three nights of physical anguish, for a much-needed trip to the dentist, and once to attend the wedding of the attendant at the riding-academy, who had taken care of Pekoe in his kennel-days and who had stood up with them at their own wedding.

It had meant leaving the child, but the reciprocation was a duty she felt incumbent upon her, and with her own hands Celia had built the steep sides to the crib that were three times the height of Hyacinth and enclosed her like a stockade.

And then there was Pekoe. That said it all. Planted about the orchard in mauve-colored signs, lettered in green and stuck on pointed sticks into the ground, were conspicuous warnings: Beware of the Dog.

He had placed the stamp of security upon all the long months of isolation. A cat-step at night and up went his ears that were as slim and as pointed as a deer's. A man walking along in a lower road one-half mile distant, and a growl sprang to his throat.

"Down, Pekoe!" was a command from Celia that he obeyed with regimental precision but with his entire body quivering with restraint. In the months of the solitude she shared with him, it had come to be her habit to address him in exactly the colloquial fashion of one person to another. "Down, Pekoe." Or: "Why, silly, that's only the butcher-boy. Let him come."

So now:

"Pekoe, I am going to town to meet your master." She could have sworn he understood! "You and Hyacinth will be alone in the house for four hours. Take good care, Pekoe."

"Yes," he said to her with his manner, standing square and planted beside her, his fanatically eager

eyes at attention and his excitement at the tidings animating his entire body.

"And don't go near the dinner-table, Pekoe. Or disturb the flowers or the china, or let Hyacinth out of her crib. It's party-night, Pekoe. Your master is coming home."

He understood all right, and placed his two great paws against her bosom and tried to kiss her face with the intensity of his understanding.

"Good dog. Be good to baby, Pekoe, and play nicely with her when she wakes. She will need no food until I return."

For answer, he trotted to beside the crib and stood there with the down-tail of obedience.

"And don't muss her up, Pekoe. Baby has got on her best dress. Her—father is coming home."

It was the first time she had ever referred to Howard that way. This time, Pekoe let out a yelp and leaped again with his heavy paws, that he could manipulate so gently, flat against her chest.

Even after she was out of the door and was hurrying along the portulaca-studded flag-stones, he watched her go, with his paws up against the window-pane and his tail wagging frantically.

She was amazed at her own matter-of-factness;

the quietness at her heart, where she had feared palpitation might suffocate her, as this hour of her supreme trial approached.

"Don't let anyone near the place, Pekoe," she said, after she had performed the dozen-and-one chores of leaving the place safe for them, and locked the door and gone down the walk, turning back to smile at the dog, where she knew he would be standing, with his front paws against the window and his tail wagging its terrific good will.

"Dear God—help me ——"

The man at work in the truck-farmer's field, three-quarters of a mile away, was never quite clear as to how long he had been vaguely conscious of a faint, singed odor across the sunny forenoon, before he began to sniff, and swing a gaze across the landscape.

It was manifest then, that a curl of blue smoke was issuing from the second story of the mauve-and-green house on the top of the slope of the orchard.

The farm-hand, leaning on his hoe, watched it for a few moments, and then, when it did not seem to grow in volume, concluded it must be from the natural outlet of a pipe or a chimney,

and returned to hacking at the soil about some mounds of potatoes.

It must have been ten or fifteen minutes later that again he was smitten with the scorched smell to the air. This time, newly aware that the clear morning was a bit bluish by now, he moved along in the direction of the house, sniffing.

That was not smoke from a chimney or an outlet! He could see it now as, approaching more closely, his eyes became accustomed to pressing their gaze into the sun-glittering distance. That was a steady stream of smoke issuing from a second-story window which was lowered about two inches from the top.

Something must be burning in that house!

"Hey!" shouted the farm-hand, and began to run toward the house, wanting from his distance to attract the attention of some one who might be in the orchard. "Hey ——!"

There was, of course, no response except the muffled barking of a dog, and by the time he reached the little picket-gate that had a mauve-and-green mail-box mounted on its post, it was clear to him that something which had not yet burst into flame was smoldering in the house.

Later, he insisted that he saw a rag of flame shoot from the slight opening of the window.

In this he must have been wrong. By a device that was never to be known, the child of Celia and Howard had in some way, with her clutching little prehensile hands, obtained a match or matches, and a slow smoldering in the mattress of her crib was what was causing the curly blue blaze. The theory had to remain that the little one had at some previous time secreted the matches in the creases of the mattress, so careful had Celia been to remove any possibility of her laying hands on anything that might have awakened her ready impulse for destruction.

At this stage of the slow smoldering of the hair of the mattress, it would have been a simple enough matter for the farm-hand to force entrance into the house and into the room where Hyacinth sat within the four high walls of her crib, playing with the wreaths of flameless smoke.

One blow against the front door, in fact, after he had run about the house trying knobs and windows and attempting to shout above the violent barking of Pekoe, was enough to crash in the panel, which he accomplished by swinging his hoe high above his head and hurling.

It was through that crashed-in panel, however, that the head of Pekoe, with two blazing, copper suns for eyes, leaped into the splintered aperture, his wide shoulders straining to force through the opening, his fanged jaws dripping. A wolfhound, outraged, enraged. Pekoe defending his charge against the intruder.

Be it said for the farm-hand, that he gave fight. While scarcely possible, it was not at all improbable that the dog could have forced through that opening. But for a full five minutes the excluded man and the imprisoned dog battled through the narrow aperture, the farm-hand aiming with his hoe at the head of Pekoe, the dog hurling his shoulders in frenzy against the door, that gave more resistance from the inside where the frame lent additional support.

Once the hoe landed, gashing Pekoe across the head so that a trickle of blood flowed down over his blazing eyes, but which he never batted as he bled. Once his great fang caught in the shoulder of the farm-hand, ripping open his shirt from the shoulder but not breaking the flesh.

But that act enraged both the man and the dog and there ensued through the shattered panel, yapping, snarling, shouting warfare and the foam-

flecked darting of the head of Pekoe, who would have torn the intruder limb from limb sooner than let him enter, and in return, the raining blows of the farm-hand beating against the head of the wolf-hound as he held his ground.

Meanwhile, puffs of smoke were drifting down the hallway from the upstairs and floating out through the hole in the door-panel, blinding the man and dog.

Finally, when the smoke began to billow, the farm-hand, with his hoe, ran shouting down the slope of the orchard, calling for help, shouting "Fire" and waving his arms with the implement.

It was probably at this precise moment that Celia and Howard were on the last few moments' lap of their hour's ride from town.

She had been kissed with the lips of a lover there at the pier. A long, precious kiss that had been bestowed unashamedly in the bustle of the docks, and that had soaked down into her heart. Her face had been held in the tight vise of hands that thrilled her, so that he might drink and drink with thirsty eyes from the clear wells of eyes, that were dear and brown to him.

All the way home, with an irresistible boyish-

ness that made her heart ache and break for him, he was at the straps of his bag, unearthing the gifts he had come bearing. The fan of sandalwood-and-ivory had been pressed into her hands and kissed there. There in the pseudo-privacy of the last seat of the commuters' train, he had wound a cloth-of-solid-gold sari about her shoulders and kissed her again. Fourteen ivory elephants walking across an arch of ebony, he had brought her from Sudan. For luck! ("Fourteen kisses for that, sweetheart.")

"Darling, not here!"

Also ten yards of Bengal cloth, woven of silk and hair, said to have been worn by a satrap of ancient Persia. Batik and bangles from Bombay and a pearl-crusted brooch, that had been worn as a turban-jewel by a minor maharajah.

And for his child! "Gift-of-a-Father-to-his-Daughter-whom-he-has-never-seen," said Howard, with mock grandeur, as he browsed frantically in his bag while the train jogged along.

"Not now, Howard. There is something I must ——"

"Here it is!" he cried, and opened a box of carved sandalwood that breathed scent as he raised the lid.

Ah—h ——

"Gift - of - a - Poet - to - his - Daughter - whom - he - has - never - seen," he might have said.

It was a necklet of flecks of Oriental topaz and amethyst, each bit of jewel separated by a gleam of pearl.

"Some day we'll have her portrait painted in this, to make up for the photographs you wouldn't send me. 'Study of Hyacinth in a Topaz and Amethyst Necklace' " he cried in his irrepressible boyishness, and kissed his words, there in the car, in a necklace across Celia's throat.

Small wonder that when the train drew in and they bundled off it, foreign-marked baggage and all, Celia still had not found the words with which to tell him.

"God will tell me how," she kept crying to herself, as her terror began to wave before her and they started for their walk home. "God will tell me how—perhaps outside on the steps—before we go in. If we sit there and I hold him tightly—in my arms—as I tell him, perhaps there—at our threshold will be the place ——"

At their threshold of a battered mauve door with a panel crashed out of it, the farm-hand

and two additional day-laborers whom he had picked up along the road were still aiming for a foam-flecked, blood-blinded, sweat-drenched head of a dog, as it lunged and tore at them through the too-small aperture. One blow of a rake had snagged the flesh over Pekoe's eye horribly, but the house was still unpenetrated.

The smoke was curling, blacker now, from the two inches of window that was lowered from the top, and Pekoe's head was wreathed in it as it poured down the ladder-like stairs.

There was no clarity to events after that. The battered, exhausted dog took his thundered orders to lie down, even while his outraged body could scarcely control the impulse to spring, and the intruders with hoe and rake dashed up the stairs, the lightning-flash figures of Celia and Howard after them.

The cruel, restraining order that kept him from battering and ramming a welcome against this beloved returning master!

Chaotic, cruel confusion and the pain and the wetness of his split head and the thickening haze which gripped the throat.

"Down Pekoe ——" and down he remained.

There had not been one lick of flame. Only a

slow smoke off the dry and moldering hair of the crib mattress that somehow, little predatory hands had managed to set match to.

Hyacinth lay near the blackening spot on the mattress that presently, unless beaten out, would burst into flame, but as if she had fallen asleep there. In the one attitude, in fact, that gave her beauty. Her head tucked downward, her arm wreathed high, and her lids softly low over unflickering eyes.

Apparently she had breathed in the smoke that finally suffocated her, without a struggle. Had dropped off to death, as it were, as she might have dropped off to sleep.

"She was too beautiful for life," said Howard, as again and again he looked at her in this strange loveliness of her little death. "God must have gotten sorry, Celia, and wanted her back."

The Third Husband

A SMALL legend hung over the tremulous little person of Mrs. Tutwiler to the effect that as a girl she had all but completed her novitiate in a convent when she eloped with Tutwiler.

That was true.

There was further legend which stated that, the rigid impeccability of the present Mrs. Tutwiler to the contrary notwithstanding, Maravene's older sister, Genevieve, had been born too few months after that event.

The truth of that is not important to this telling.

If ever there was a life that had settled itself along lines of conformity, that life resided in the person of Leila Tutwiler. Leila was said not to have been her given name, but the one under which she had chosen to take her vows in the convent. Probably. There was something about her smooth and unrestless face that made it easy to conceive of it as the face of Sister Leila, set in

pallor into the fluted linen of the order she had forsaken.

Maravene had that same pallor and twice that immobility. Once, when she had been sent home from school for not only pilfering the gold bangle off a little girl's bracelet, but scratching a long ribbon of flesh off her face when apprehended, she had actually, so it seemed to Mrs. Tutwiler, walked into the house with the face of an angel. A small angel with finger nails that had drawn blood.

There was nothing impulsively naughty about Maravene. She was a thoughtful child who could perform a vicious act with the same careful profundity she bestowed upon the many really lovely ones of which she was capable.

It might be said of Maravene that she thought thrice before she leaped. That was what made her a little terrifying to her mother. To her sister. To Owen Stopes, who had lived in the same house with her and had seen her grow from rompers, in which she never romped, to the inscrutable repose of her nineteenth year.

Which is how Mrs. Tutwiler would have preferred to state the fact that Stopes was a boarder. He had come to live in her home after an indis-

creet investment of Mrs. Tutwiler's insurance money had made the upkeep of the small house near Morningside Heights, bought and almost paid for by the late Herbert Tutwiler, prohibitive.

Mrs. Tutwiler's slightly ambiguous advertisement had read something like this: It would have read something like this, being Mrs. Tutwiler's:

Eminently respectable widow with two small children wishes to rent one floor of her tastefully furnished home, consisting of two rooms and bath, to business or professional gentleman. Highest references offered and requested.

For sixteen years, Stopes, who was thirty-five when Maravene was nineteen, and who looked like a mastiff dog, had occupied the second-floor living-room, bedroom, and bath of the small house situated in one of those streets, within distant shadow of Columbia University, which borrows a slight odor of campus by virtue of the fact that it lodges an occasional student or assistant professor.

A professor, probably one with a bit of private income, had been in Mrs. Tutwiler's mind when she inserted the advertisement. One, to be sure, had applied. A second-assistant instructor in archæology, evidently though without the bit of the private income, because he had been able to

pay just one half of Mrs. Tutwiler's asking price. Maravene, who was three at the time, had thoughtfully sent his pince-nez crashing to the hearthstone as he had stooped to caress her.

Stopes had been the sole other applicant. His square mastiff ugliness had appalled Mrs. Tutwiler, who was a person of small prettiness, small features, small gestures, smiles, and amiabilities. But his had been bank and church references, and even back in the days when he was salesman in the concern of which he was eventually to become president, there was something eminently respectable about his connections.

ACME OFFICE FURNITURE CO.

23 NASSAU STREET

NEW YORK

Mr. Owen Stopes.

Mrs. Tutwiler was well entitled to feel that a benign star had been shining over the small house near Morningside Heights, the evening that Stopes called after business hours with the newspaper that carried her advertisement protruding from his side coat pocket.

The first month in the new household Mr. Stopes had presented Mrs. Tutwiler with a green

leather chair. An office piece, to be sure, but it filled an empty niche in the entrance hall that Mrs. Tutwiler had been planning to fill just before the untimely death of Mr. Tutwiler. Many a niche besides, was Stopes destined to fill in that home.

A Godsend was what the coming of Stopes practically amounted to in the home of Mrs. Tutwiler and her two little girls. She could never bring herself to put it just that way. There seemed sacrilege in associating anything so casual as the coming of Stopes in response to a newspaper advertisement, with divine intervention. In a youth that contained the tryst outside a convent wall and the faint legend concerning the birth of Genevieve, Mrs. Tutwiler had committed sacrilege for which her entire subsequent life was to be an attempt at atonement.

Phrase it as she would, or rather as she would not, the coming of Stopes was nothing short of some sort of benign intervention. Dear Stopes. He was like nothing so much as the mastiff he resembled. Heavy-shouldered, square, flat-faced, with strong short black hair which stood like the bristles of a firm brush, he soon took on such habits as bolting the doors of the house at night,

sending up the porter from his own office to repair screens or mend a boiler, and frequently, of a Saturday afternoon, tinkering himself at the hardware of a broken window or a door lock.

Before he had been in the house two years, he had averted another bad investment of Mrs. Tutwiler's limited capital, gouged with his strong short forefinger for a safety pin which had lodged in the throat of the rapidly purpling Genevieve, weather-stripped the entire front of the house, and unearthed the unsavory fact that little Maravene kept a small lozenge box in which she collected the wings of houseflies which she was fond of dismembering.

And if Mrs. Tutwiler, who was no less grateful than gracious, realized all this, to say nothing of Genevieve, who at sixteen had already reached a nice, average, in fact quite pretty development, what must Maravene, who seemed to come cautiously, thoughtfully, and a little piously into her early maturity, have thought of the largesse of this man whose rôle in her mother's house so transcended that of mere lodger.

To do Maravene justice, which is difficult because she was always receiving either too much or too little of it, she was fully aware, long before

she was conscious of being aware, that in the person of Stopes resided sanctuary.

To what extent, not even Mrs. Tutwiler, who had shed her quota of tears over Maravene, both of joy and of despair, could realize. Nor could Genevieve, for that matter, who knew her Stopes as well as, in her opinion, he could be known, but who had never seen him turn a pale jade-green of anger or beheld his gimlet eyes flood suddenly with the tears of a kind of adoration.

Maravene had! She had seen him cry once, or rather had seen his eyes smeared with a moist kind of pain. The occasion was too shameful to bear frequent recalling, even in the innermost places of her mind.

When Maravene was in business college, just a year after Genevieve had finished and obtained her position with the Hargrave Vaccine Company of Brooklyn, the wretched affair had occurred.

There had been a boy in the bookkeeping course, a driblet of a fellow with no particular face and the habit of twitching it, but that is neither here nor there. There had been this boy, with Mrs. Tutwiler's faint chirrupings of dissent for background, and Maravene's walks with him

of a Sunday along the Palisades, and then suddenly, out of what was practically a clear enough sky, Maravene, with purpling pools under her eyes, seeking out Stopes in the furniture concern in Nassau Street.

It was in the days of the lifetime of old Mr. Clark, and therefore before Stopes had his own private office. On an iron spiral staircase that led to the basement, she had told him. Quietly, as she did everything, and the tears that had squirted across his eyes had seemed ludicrous almost before they had flayed her with their pathos.

Stopes' face crying had been something to remember, even under the horrible stress of that day of furtive trips to the offices of furtive doctors. The trip home, half fainting in a taxicab with Stopes. The subsequent furtive lies of the illness that had overtaken her at the business school. Stopes, who hated lying, hated lies, lying. . . .

The tears of his kind of adoration were another matter. They were not tears, really. But a sort of shine. Maravene knew the shine. Genevieve suspected it. Usually it came over trivialities. On the stairs of a Fifth Avenue 'bus, when she had paused in the jerky climb to smile down at him over a shoulder. Easter, when she tucked him

a blue egg under his breakfast napkin. Frequently at table when she lied and squirmed into telling the truth, because his mastiff's face, little-eyed, four-cornered, homely as salt, was opposite her.

Yes, from the day he had apprehended her pulling the gauze wings off of house-flies, on through a series of secret and sometimes startling ordeals of her curiously idyllic and sinister little girlhood, Maravene Tutwiler had reason to regard Owen Stopes as a Godsend.

Sometimes Mrs. Tutwiler, simple soul, wondered just how much Stopes suspected of the secret fears, tribulations, and heartache that were part of being the mother of Maravene. Simple soul, indeed! As if she, who knew only half of what Stopes knew, realized one third as much as he.

Stopes knew Maravene like a book, Mrs. Tutwiler was fond of twittering when her sense of bewilderment was strong upon her over this daughter of hers who, with the face of a Madonna, had committed the incredible act of banging an insolent delivery boy over the cheek with her bare palm, and with that same beauty more relevantly put over her, had brought home a park derelict to tuck into her own small white bed.

Stopes knew Maravene like a book. Nothing of the sort! He knew her with the tormented clairvoyance of secret and consuming love. He knew her with strange tentacles of intuition that reached out to touch her little atrocities with tenderness. He knew her with his tired, hungry-looking eyes that were bored back into his head as if gimlets had ground them there. He knew when she lied, not because any shadow flitted across her immaculate face, but because it must have flitted across his intuition.

The year that Maravene was eighteen and stenographer for a firm of wholesale jewelers in Maiden Lane, there came along something like a crisis in the special affairs where she and Stopes were concerned. Or at least where Stopes was concerned. It could scarcely be said that Maravene was ever so much concerned, as involved.

She came up to his room, a somewhat rare but by no means unprecedented performance, one rainy evening after they had both returned home from business. Stopes took breakfast, served on a card table in his sitting-room, and his evening meal downstairs with the Tutwiler family. Since Genevieve, employed by a Brooklyn firm, was the last to return home of an evening, dinner was sel-

dom served before seven. In the hour before, Stopes usually read, beside an electric lamp that stood on the desk of his comfortable sitting-room. He had a steadfast and an appallingly conservative liking for certain good books. Once a year he reread practically all of Dickens, and his Carlyle's *French Revolution* was so thumbled that the pages containing the description of the "A" formation were held together with transparent adhesive tape. He could recite long stretches of "Kublai Khan" and a section of "Il Penseroso" which dated back to school-day memory-tests. Burke's "Conciliation Speech," "The Ancient Mariner," and "Idylls of the King," required reading in his limited school days, had by now developed into desired reading.

Stopes was one of those business men within whom certain natural proclivities had not been quite smothered.

This particular evening, Maravene, knocking at his door, could tell by the color of the light which showed beneath, that he was seated beside the reading lamp.

She was a slim girl, of light fleet step and not given to preamble.

"I've done it this time," she said, and stood

suddenly before him there in the pool of light that flowed from his lamp onto the carpet and made a circle.

He never could look up from a page and find her standing there, without his throat giving a click, like a gate closing.

"What have you done?" he said in the tone of what-have-you-done-now, and laid *Nicholas Nickleby* face downward.

She had a beatitude of face that to him was breath-taking. A face seldom lit by smile; a face never to turn to glance upon in a crowd; a face that if ever it was to dawn upon you, came slowly, like a pale moonrise.

"I did it without thinking, Stopes," she said, and laid something on the arm of his chair that glittered. "I've been crazy-afraid for days."

She had been crazy-afraid for days! Her eyes were like lily pads in the calm pond of her face.

Uncanny, though, in what flash he knew, because in all the tortured and teasing years of his propinquity to her, nothing so monstrous as this had ever crept out of the ivory placidity of her.

Maravene, who knew her subtle beauty too subtly ever to adorn it with a jewel, had stolen from the firm that employed her the oblong

brooch that lay on the arm of the chair. There were a square emerald and a square diamond in its center, mounted on a fine web of platinum and diamond lace, the tiny safety chain set with specks of alternating diamonds and emeralds, emphasizing its value.

"Put it back for me, Stopes," she said, with something that for her at least amounted to the frenzy of closing her narrow fingers about his coat sleeve.

Incredibly, then, he was right! The anger he could sometimes feel towards her, intensified beyond anything he had ever known, came over him in a flash of colored lightning. Because as if to shut out sight of her, he had squeezed shut his eyes and, without volition of which he was conscious, crash went the palm of his hand against her cheek.

When he tore his eyelids apart again, there she stood unwavering before him, with the faint replica of his fingers in a tinge against her cheeks. But his revulsion endured. Why, she was just any little stenographer, only minus any of the decencies that made most of them nice people. She was infinitely less than just any stenographer who strap-hung in droves in the eight-thirty sub-

way rush. She was not only of their usual clay, but minus their caliber. Dozens-of-thousands, superior to her, took dictation in sky-scraper hives, and misspelled "receipt" and "occasion" and "disappoint" and kept a towel and a cake of perfumed soap and a box of breath pastilles in the drawers of their yellow-oak typewriting desks.

No, she was not by a long shot just any little stenographer with a pale face and a narrow body, a desk-stoop and the shallow, herd-desires of the dozens of thousands of them that tapped out "Dear Sirs" and "Yours Trulys" for fifteen dollars a week. She was a thief. A thief, who a few years back, on that day when they had stood together on the spiral staircase in the office-furniture salesroom, had confessed to also being a— Well, well, well, what business was it of his? The world was filled with such. Damnation! Let the mother of this little unpainted harlot, face the music. Why he? Her mother or her sister Genevieve was as capable as he, of coping with viciousness. Why he?

And yet, even with his palm stinging and the sick feeling of reaction setting in, Stopes knew that once again, secretly and furtively, it would be he who would somehow bear the lonely brunt.

The narrow ivory girl before him in the iris-blue blouse with its neck line cut mediæval fashion in a straight line from shoulder to shoulder, was not just any little stenographer with a pale face and a bony body and a desk stoop. At least not to Stopes. Never could be. She was more!

Dammit, a man could be honest with his miserable self! She was the soul and the meaning of life in a world that was almost unbearably exciting because she lived in it. She tipped his days with flame. She ran along his consciousness as if it were a wick being chewed by that flame. She was a thief and a few years before had confessed to being what else she was, on that spiral staircase of the office-furniture company.

"It must have been somebody outside of myself did it, Stopes; I'm not quite clear about it all. I never took anything in my life before. Or wanted to."

"You're sick," he said. "Or crazy."

"I hate the goddam thing," she said, and looked at him with the clarity of her face undefiled.

"I know you do," he said; "that's what makes you a—a—devil-on-wheels." And then because of a sense of impotence that was too embarrassing

to be borne, he took her by her flimsy shoulders and began shaking her and twisting his face that had great dredges down the sides of his mouth and gave him jowls. "You're just bad. I could do something terrible to you. I could break your legs or twist out your arms or— O God, I don't know!"

"Please, Stopes, put it back for me."

"Back where?"

"In stock. I'll tell you how."

"Put it back yourself or take the damn consequences."

"I'm being watched."

"Bah!"

"There's a detective."

"You're lying."

"Well then, it's not me he's watching. That's the terrible part. It's a fellow named Harry Simon. A Jewish fellow. He's got a wife. There are babies, too."

"You devil!"

"I couldn't stand Harry getting into trouble for what I've done. It'll ruin him. I'll have to confess, Stopes, if you don't put it back in stock for me. And then . . ."

And then. . . . She had him there. The sim-

ultaneous desire to twist her arms and to stand between her and a world not precious enough to comprehend the tangled gold wires of her nerves made him coarse.

"You'd better have been born dead, Maravene," he said, slowly trying to force himself, as he had done for years now, to see her as she must appear to the world that milled casually about her during a business day. Bah! a second-rate stenographer who hung her hat on a peg six days a week, took her dictation in pot-hooks, and hurried home to the commonplace pleasures of her middle-class existence and possibly to a middle-class courtship. There were half a dozen such in his office. He scarcely knew them by face.

And yet Stopes realized that he lied to himself. It was his way of preparing himself to be denied. There was a quality about Maravene that might not be easily discernible. Something as faint as phosphorus in half-light. Now Genevieve was just any little stenographer. Nice girl, Genevieve. Comprehensible, regular girl, with a genius for making corned-beef hash. But this one here before him now, with the stolen bauble on the chair between them . . .

Good God! was this the way men were sup-

posed to be caught in the toils of lustrous women? That was what they were usually called. The toils. You never heard much about the toils of anything else. The toils of women. Was this attraction which he had been secretly fighting during the years that Maravene was attaining her maturity one of those unhealthy and persistent infatuations that can carry men down?

Why, as she stood before him, smeared with the memory of a four-year-old soiled affair, and now daubed with the unspeakable act of theft, was she not despicable to him? It seemed to him that he put actual physical effort into trying to despise her.

"I know just how you feel, Stopes," she said, taking up the pin without much of a gesture. "It is asking a lot."

Not a wile to her. Not the ordinary wile of a tear or a repercussion from the hard thing he had just said to her: "You'd better have been born dead." She had never as a child cried for what she wanted. Rather, she had sat and glowed for it, Genevieve, who could squall, giving in.

"Well, well, what is it I am expected to do? Creep in by night for the purpose of putting back

stolen goods and possibly being caught red-handed, like any common thief."

"It's simple, Stopes. Do it for me. Otherwise, I'll confess tomorrow. I can't stand their shadowing Harry."

That was true. Anything hurt was anathema to her. Every one in the household had grown accustomed to shielding Maravene, who could pull fly wings, from the sight of anything wounded.

How sweet she was, how drenched with a quality of mercy when she said that. And she meant it. Suddenly the situation with all its alarming ramifications rushed over Stopes.

"That breastpin must be expensive."

"Our price-list is two thousand five hundred."

"What in God's name possessed you?"

"I don't know. Mother is always looking at pins like that in show windows."

Bosh. Cheap sob stuff. And yet he knew that it must have been something as inchoate as that which prompted the taking. Mrs. Tutwiler set great store by a star-shaped pendant with a pearl in its center from which hung a small, blue-enamelled watch. She was a great one for bangles and he could not recall ever having seen her without

two little gold tassels that hung from a brooch she wore at her throat.

"I happened to be in the showroom, Stopes, when I took it. I think it is the first time I'd ever been in there. My boss sent for me to take dictation from a customer . . ."

Her boss! Bah! just any stenographer!

"I daren't put it back myself. Stopes, if you could come to look at brooches—they're not particular, like some firms, about retail customers. You won't need a card. They'll show you the stock. You could slip it back onto a tray . . ."

"You mean—I am to go into that salesroom with stolen goods in my pocket that detectives are out for . . ."

"It's the only way. All you have to do when you have a tray or two of the brooches before you, is to slip this one in. They will put them away after you've gone. It will seem as if this one must have been caught in the velvet of one of the cases. Or that two were stuck together. Or even, Stopes, if they should suspect that it has been put back, they will never dream it was not some one from the inside. And they'll have no proof. Against Harry, or me, or anybody. I'll see to it that you come at a time when Harry is out

to lunch, and one of the bosses himself will have to wait on you! Harry mustn't get blamed, Stopes."

He looked at her, sick with the knowledge of so-be-it.

And so it was. Looking back, after the indescribable ordeal of leaving that brooch lying on the trayful of them spread before him in the salesroom of the jewelry firm that employed Maravene, it seemed to Stopes that his clammy faltering hand and his sweating pallor must have betrayed him.

How otherwise than clammy with self-distaste, and no small sense of fear, could the business man Stopes, who had by then succeeded old Mr. Clark as vice-president of the large and well-established firm of which he was eventually to become head, have approached the sneaking rôle?

There had been important conferences the forenoon of his visit to the jewelry concern, with the largest firm of roller-top desk manufacturers in Grand Rapids. Then, Stopes, after exercising his buying authority to close a deal that amounted to over two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, had plunged a nervous hand into the pocket of his

conservative business man's gray sack coat, for the feel of the bauble there in its tissue, clapped on his hat, and rushed into the turmoil of Nassau Street, working his way rapidly to Maiden Lane in order to arrive there at the hour when the salesman Harry would be out to lunch.

Anger mingled with his sense of degradation. Self-anger. Stopes, whose cautious integrity and inviolate methods had carried him far in business, was not the man for this mission. And yet he carried it off in a manner to excite neither comment nor suspicion.

The brooch, it was later decided in the offices of the jewelry firm, must have adhered to the under side of one of the velvet cases. The rather high improbability of that, considering the amount of searching that had been done, went down before the evidence of the brooch in hand.

Walking out of these offices, drenched with a perspiration that made his underclothing crawl along his back in warm damp ridges, the sight of the faint silhouette of Maravene, through a ground-glass door, bent beatific at her typewriter, filled him with horror of himself. Not because of the incredibly equivocal position of Owen Stopes as he walked out of that office, but be-

cause the very frosted glass that bore her image became precious.

And as if this situation, and the dangerous and compromising position, were not sufficient unto themselves, there occurred in the elevator going down from the jewelry firm an encounter between Stopes and a young fellow named Ridgely Clark, that ironically and innocently enough, was to swerve their two destinies, to say nothing of that of the lambent figure upstairs with her silhouette reflected preciousy in the ground glass of the office door.

The Clark boys, Ridgely and Lorenz, were sons of the late old Ridgely Clark, Sr., into whose place Stopes had stepped, following his death. Both the Clark boys, due to indifferent health and still more indifferent enthusiasm, had passed by their opportunities to succession. There was considerable talk that the size of the old man Clark's fortune had been largely a myth and that of it which was not, had been dissipated by his sons, following their inheritance.

Be that as it may, the young Clark who encountered Stopes in the elevator, still gave evidence of the slim, effete elegance which a grim and

penny-wise old father had detested in both his boys.

The result of this chance encounter was a visit one Sunday morning, of Ridgely Clark to the rooms of Stopes, who had in his possession a certain photograph of his late father, which an executor of the estate was anxious to lay hands on in order to present an oil reproduction of it to a Stamp Collector's Club which the old gentleman Clark had founded.

It was on the occasion of this visit, that Ridgely Clark and Maravene Tutwiler met for the first time, introduced by Stopes as she was standing in the lower hall buttoning her gloves, and the two men were leaving the house together.

They walked, the three, as far as the nearest subway hood. There was talk of a casual sort and very little of that. So little, in fact, and so little memorable, that for the life of him, rack his tortured brain as he would, it was impossible for Stopes to conceive how, after that tiny interlude between the house and the subway station, these two had managed the magic telepathy of arranging another meeting.

And what another meeting! There was little time for Stopes to brace himself for what he must

always have known would, sooner or later, unless his courage or the gods interceded, descend devastatingly and shiver the very rivets of his being.

The Tuesday following the Sunday of the chance encounter in the Tutwiler hallway, while Stopes and Genevieve and Mrs. Tutwiler were having their usual weekly dinner of corned-beef hash at which Genevieve was past master, Clark and Maravene, who had met in Nassau Street after business hours, were sitting in a chop house off Cedar Street, becoming engaged.

Stopes, to whom the incongruity of circumstances was always dramatic, afterwards let such thoughts as these flagellate him:

While we were eating corned-beef hash—drat Genevieve's incessant chatter!—Clark, a toothpick of a ne'er-do-well fellow, if ever there was one, was sitting in a restaurant in Cedar Street inheriting the earth.

Damn it, why the earth! Why not an unscrupulous little —— Bah! of what good this despicable self-deception! Clark was inheriting Maravene. He was inheriting the earth. Clark, of all people! Why, the old gentleman, his father, had so much as told Stopes, on more than one occasion, that he had borne two crosses in his life—

time. His two sons. He had never, in his bitter pride, admitted as much to anyone besides Stopes, whom he admired; whom he often regarded with frustrated eyes that plainly hankered for what Stopes might have been to him as son.

To think of it! To think of it! In the watches of sleepless night after sleepless night, the tormenting irony of what had happened would sweep over and drench him in misery.

Ridgely Clark! Both the Clark boys had failed miserably in the business. They had neither stamina, ability, nor much health. They were frail and with a tubercular threat inherited from the mother. Lorenz, in fact, had once been obliged to live for six months in the high altitudes of Colorado. During their brief and inconsequential apprenticeship in the business, they had been tolerated only for the sake of the old gentleman.

Who—who was Ridgely Clark to thus inherit the earth? Who? cried Stopes to himself in the bitterness of these nights. What did he know about Maravene?

What did anyone know about Maravene, except Stopes.

On that thought, Stopes had once raised his head from his hot pillow and grinned in the dark.

Maravene, sleeping in an adjoining room under the very roof with him, how strangely she was in his power.

Before Maravene had come to him with the telling of her love for Ridgely, and of his love for her, Stopes, who had sensed it with his pain from almost the very start, had known that eventually she must come to him. First.

Literally indeed, she was in his power, because Ridgely was not the man to span with his understanding, the story which Stopes had endured hearing that day on the spiral staircase. Neither would he hold up under the knowledge of the mission that had taken Stopes into the building on Nassau Street the noonday of their encounter in the elevator.

His standards were the careful ones that divided women into ninety-nine and one. Indiscretions and his wife. How like a pale moon Maravene must have risen over the heated years of Ridgely's follies! Stopes had worked out in his own mind the machinations of a mind like Ridgely's. Maravene was a careful madness to Ridgely. Wives were made of her demureness, but seldom tipped with her flame. She was not only desirable to Ridgely, she was desirable to him as a wife.

The thought made Stopes toss and toss in his bed. But how little Ridgely knew; how little he understood, silly fellow, that this girl was subtle flame that would chew along him as if he were so much wick. Simultaneously, she would madden him with her desirability and with her perverseness. No one could handle her but Stopes. No one could make a woman of her but Stopes. His blood beat about in turmoil against his ears.

For days before Maravene came to him, as come she must, Stopes lay throughout long nights, tossing, sometimes even moaning when his face was pressed into the pillow.

She came, and it must be said for her that she came innocent of her rôle in any of the emotional turmoil that raged behind his four-cornered face; a face that arrested the glance and magnetized, even while it repelled. She came, perhaps a little fearfully, but as always without wile.

"Ridgely wants to marry me, Stopes."

It was the hour before dinner and he had been sitting for more than half of it beside his reading lamp, with his face leaning into his hands, an unopened copy of *Barnaby Rudge* on the table. Braced as he was for what was about to descend upon him, her words set up such a clatter within

him, that he felt as if coals were clattering down a long chute into his brain. So! Ridgely wants to marry Maravene. So. So. So.

If she detected the flash of something evil in his eye, the flash of his sense of power to snatch her happiness from her, not a ripple of that apprehension crossed her pallor.

As for Stopes, he had never really visualized beyond this moment, except with the consoling thought that he could, if he would, save himself from losing her to another. That he could really permit her marriage to Ridgely to take place had been just as inconceivable as the fact that he was letting it happen now.

"I'm going to be a good girl, Stopes. Just as good as Ridgely thinks I am. As good as I must be, to deserve him."

Who could have stated her particular case more subtly! Her way of pleading his silence in a matter of gravest jeopardy to her was to command it in a softly declarative sentence. Either he, Stopes, must rise now and crash down the structure of her happiness with this much-vaunted power that was his, or acquiesce in the key of her same subtlety.

Numb with the sense of his impotence where

crossing her was concerned, he did less than either. He began to protect her from the unworthiness of Ridgely.

"Ridgely is a sickly fellow, Maravene."

"I love him."

"He must have gone through most of his inheritance by now."

"I love him."

"Ridgely had been something of a bad egg, Maravene."

"I don't believe all that," she said, her lids, heavy white ones that were seldom raised, lifting suddenly to reveal the bright blue of her eyes. "But, anyway, if it is true, all that was before he had me."

She was going to marry him, then, to reform him! Bah! she was just any woman in love, bothersome with an excess of maternal instinct. She could nag at her mother and Genevieve, and now she would nag at a husband. Good riddance, cried Stopes to himself, and tried to keep down a desire of years to bend her head backward and cover her face and her cool throat with kisses.

"Have you thought of income and Ridgely's prospects and the possibility of children and what it all means?"

"I have thought of everything, and nothing is insurmountable. I love him."

Lived there a man so blessed as this toothpick-of-a-fellow who was too tall, too lean, and wore his inconsequential blond mustache clipped like a tiny hedge. Lived there a man so blessed? Or was he cursed? A wick which was to be teased by the flame of this ceaseless gnawing little Maravene. How she could gnaw. At one's peace of mind. At one's peace of spirit.

The man who married her would simultaneously be cursed and blessed. And who was Ridgely to be thus blessed? Who was Ridgely to be even blessed with the curse of her?

"Ridgely is only a little boy at heart, Stopes. It would kill me to ever do a thing that would hurt him."

It would kill Maravene to hurt Ridgely. It would kill Stopes to hurt Maravene. It made one feel a little crazy. This is the house that Jack built. . . .

"Well, now," he said, in the high false voice of a horrid old poll-parrot, "it would never do to kill you and hurt your little boy. Now wouldn't that be just awful! Guess that settles that. You've got to have your little boy."

"Oh, Stopes!" she said, softly, in the key of being ashamed for him.

Queer that he should have chosen to give in this horrid and rather dreadful vein of mockery, a promise that had its roots in decency.

It scarcely can be said that one single aspect of the marriage of Maravene and Ridgely—and there was no aspect of it that he was not to know—came as a surprise to Stopes. Except, perhaps, the element of his surprise that his wisdom before the event could have been so impeccable.

The marriage took place in Mrs. Tutwiler's small front parlor, which contained a three-piece set of unused-looking marquetry furniture, a false fireplace filled with dried lotus flowers, and framed photographs of both girls on an upright piano.

There were eleven guests, water-ice, lady-fingers, and claret punch. The bride and groom, who had found a small furnished apartment on Ninety-sixth Street, departed first for a week-end at a pretentious hotel in Atlantic City. Mrs. Tutwiler cried onto the glass of her husband's framed photograph, and Genevieve, in an old-rose dress that matched her hair, kept the usual stiff

upper lip of one marriageable sister at the wedding of another. A Mrs. Thomson, sister-in-law of the late Mr. Tutwiler, tossed a cup of rice down the stairs after the young pair. Lorenz got rather tipsy by supplementing his claret punch from his hip pocket, and was taken home by his brother's best man, Guy Fitch, a wealthy young fellow whose father had made a fortune in a nationally known orange drink.

Beginning with the rather unstereotyped procedure of the groom, who had forgotten his wallet, borrowing twenty dollars from Stopes to pay the clergyman, it became thereafter as stereotyped a wedding as ever took place in the neat parlor of a respectable widow whose daughter was accomplishing the welcome miracle of marrying out of stenography into a social plane above her own.

The Clark boys might be said to have barged into their inheritance, but scarcely through it. They owned jointly, a mauve speed roadster, with special body and rumble seat. Maravene's ring was a star sapphire supposed to match her eyes, and the small furnished apartment was two hundred a month, still allowing them a margin of income to live on while the brothers were casting about for a business connection.

The incident of the twenty dollars to pay the clergyman caused Stopes to smile on what might be said to be the wrong side of his mouth. As it happened, Ridgely repaid the twenty dollars, one Sunday evening a few weeks after the marriage, when the bride and groom were having Sunday-night supper at the 'Tutwilers'. But it appealed so to Stopes' sense of irony, that he folded the bill away and kept it locked in a drawer along with some canceled insurance policies. Stopes had paid literally and figuratively for that marriage. And he was to continue to pay and pay.

Because almost from the start the young Ridgely Clarks were in bad waters. All within the first year, Maravene's premature baby was born dead; the brothers lost a larger sum in a sky-writing advertising enterprise than either of them would admit; Lorenz went down with a cold that bordered on pneumonia; and after the stillbirth of her child, the Ridgely Clarks moved to a small apartment hotel where Maravene, as she regained her strength, might be free of even the light responsibilities of housekeeping.

It was along about this time that the paying and paying began. With what was left of the venture into sky-writing, the Clark brothers, in-

spired, no doubt, by the success of the Fitch Orangeola enterprises, invested in a small chain of street-stands selling a pineapple drink called Pinola. Guy Fitch's father was a conspicuous example of a man who had started small and whose system of soft-drink stands had ultimately netted millions. The Clark boys started with four of the Pinola stands, and six months before they would admit it, the fact of failure had become obvious to everyone except perhaps Maravene.

Well might Stopes ask himself again and again, lived there a man so blessed as this toothpick of a fellow, Ridgely Clark. With her face blocked into plane surfaces of the pallor of distaste for her mission, Maravene called on Stopes one morning at his office, for the first loan.

Their capital was temporarily tied in the Pinola enterprise. Profits were sure but slow. Ultimate success was certain, but the idea of confiding in Mrs. Tutwiler, who was pretty certain to have crying-spells from worry, or of returning to the pettifogging atmosphere of her mother's house during this brief period of financial stress, was distasteful to both Ridgely and herself. Would Stopes oblige with five hundred? There was some of the Pinola stock for security.

Pinola stock for security! Stopes could have laughed as she stood there in the torment over money matters that was to hold her in its grip from the very first months of her marriage; could have laughed as he went through the gesture of accepting the handsomely engraved papers. The Clark boys, futile fellows, were riding for another fall. It was well known down at the office-furniture concern, where they had tried to raise collateral, that the soft-drink venture, feebly managed, had lost ground from the start. It was months before this realization of failure was to dawn upon Maravene.

It came by the time she was in Stopes' debt for something like eleven hundred dollars, and Ridgely, who had not been without enterprise, came down suddenly with septic sore throat.

How debonair she was in her explanations to Stopes. All Ridgely needed was a little more coarse-grained stuff in him to enable him to cope with the average American business man. All the boys needed was time and more capital. The Fitch enterprise had not started on a shoe-string, don't let anyone deceive you on that. Why, you would be surprised at Ridgely's tenacity. If an old grouch of a stockholder wasn't holding out,

the Pineapple Growers' Company would be clamoring to put capital behind the Pinola stands. All the boys needed was time and a little encouragement.

Ridgely had the making of a successful business man in him and Maravene intended to see that he got his chance. With due respect to old Mr. Clark, he had never understood his highly-strung boys.

Just you wait! The Clarks were going to ride around in high-power motor cars yet, the kind Ridgely and Lorenz had been used to. Mrs. Tutwiler, who loved geegaws, was going to wear diamond ones, and Genevieve was going to thumb her nose at the Brooklyn Vaccine farm and study interior decorating as she had always yearned to do.

Standing before Stopes, in what must have been excoriating humiliation, her high-handed little air of indomitability never deserted her. Ridgely would have come himself this time, but it only seemed natural that she should have volunteered. Old friend of the family like Stopes—known him all her life—old hotel bill always falling due just as notes were to be met—did you ever know a new business enterprise that did not lose money

the first year?—ill omen if it didn't—silly old stockholder of the Pineapple Growers' Company. Just a matter of time.

Dear old Stopes, hate to have mother or Genevieve or anybody know about it, but could you let us have another five hundred? That will make—let me see—well, whatever it is, Stopsey, you know that Clark is good for every penny of it, interest meanwhile.

Interest meanwhile! That was part of the inscrutable wonder of her. She spoke in terms of the interest that would be paid with the same high-handed assurance that she spoke of the interest that had not been paid.

She was in love, and no manœuvre on behalf of Ridgely was too lowly. Fortunate for her, during those days of the travail of her still-born child, her subsequent nervous irritability, and the ailing health and perilous investments of her husband, that Stopes, too, was in love!

He found himself waiting, and to his self-disgust, hoping, for her almost certain monthly visits to his office and the invariable attitude she assumed on the far side of his desk, with her tranquil hands interlaced, the forefingers in a point.

Stopes was practically carrying the Ridgely

Clarks by now, and most probably Lorenz, too. This marriage must ultimately end on the rocks. Ridgely, who could send her out on such missions as this, would be the kind to turn ugly as his passion waned. How much of it had waned by now, as, worn down by the unsuccessful birth of the first child and tormented by money matters, that pale luminosity which at best was discernible only to the few, began to pale in Maravene.

An old battered hope, that the day of her wedding had all but died, began to lift its head in Stopes. And ashamed of it and to batter it down again, he continued to give and give, even after the plight of the Clarks had begun to make inroads, noticeable inroads, on certain financial habits of his life.

It was Ridgely's septic sore throat, threatening dangerous development, which finally precipitated the surrender that Maravene, with all her strength of purpose, had been fighting off for months.

To recover from the additional strain of doctor's bills, night nurse, and Ridgely's sustained period of inactivity, the young couple came home to Mrs. Tutwiler's to live, forcing out the student

who had occupied Maravene's room since her marriage.

Maravene was once more under the same roof with Stopes, and in a way that was torture to him of a kind he had never dreamed. A heavy folding-door, with a wardrobe against it, separated his bedroom from theirs. Maravene as a girl had occupied it, but barely the sound of her light movements had been audible. But now, especially with Ridgely confined to his bed of the dangerous throat infection, the two layers of their voices came through to him. Maravene's light, steady, of gradual inflection. Ridgely's querulous, repetitious, and sometimes sharply imperative. They talked a great deal, with nervous constancy, Stopes thought, but never loudly enough for what they said to be distinguishable. Sometimes the voices sank to what was unmistakably the key of endearment.

If ever a man schooled himself to endure agony of the spirit, that man was Stopes.

During the long stretches of the lonely evenings in his room, he used to listen to them together, every muscle of his face rigid against pain. The return of Maravene into that household was a curse to one already cursed. And yet, not alone

because of the dependence of the Tutwiler household upon the presence of its eighteen-year lodger, but because by now he had developed a sort of saddistic pride of endurance, the thought of running away from a spectacle which inflicted pain upon a pain already there, was not allowed to enter his head.

For two months, while Ridgely grew steadily better, they occupied that room adjoining, and then when the collapse of the Pinola enterprise was perforce an admitted fact, Lorenz moved in, occupying Genevieve's room, while she made out on the davenport in the parlor.

Maravene had come home all right, bag, baggage, husband, and brother-in-law.

And here for both Mrs. Tutwiler and Genevieve, be it said, Maravene had come home to a welcome. What of Genevieve's girlhood may have been warped and made bitter by the machinations of a sister she was never to understand, was forgiven by the grave and personable Genevieve. She gave up her pretty room; she gave of her salary; she gave of her effort to put this marriage on some sort of an equable basis.

She pitied Maravene, she grieved for her, she even pampered her, which same could be said of

Mrs. Tutwiler, whose agony of spirit was the only thing in her life that had succeeded in keeping her quiet. And in her turn, Maravene had two men on her hands who let her drain of her faint strength, pampering them.

Ridgely and Lorenz were two dispirited and sometimes sullen boys, and there were times when through the folding-doors, Stopes, with his finger nails clenched into his palms, could hear Ridgely's voice rise from querulous into the out-and-out abusive. Once it seemed to him, so that on his side of the door he grasped a chair as if to fling it, Stopes heard the sound of a blow, and a woman's quick cry of pain.

Sure enough, there was a dull red mark to the left of Maravene's chin at dinner, which she explained as a bruise from walking into the edge of the mantelpiece.

How valiantly she lied! Such pity for her smote Stopes, that to continue to eat his dinner, which was his favorite one of corned-beef hash prepared by Genevieve, was an ordeal.

Poor Genevieve! This weekly Tuesday evening occasion, when she could rush home from the office, to season and concoct the meat dish which she had already boiled and chopped before leaving

in the morning, was labor of love. It practically amounted to the peak of her week. An old dread began now to come to life in her again. Was it possible that, after all—Stopes had been in love with Maravene. Was it possible that even now ——

It was.

And yet there leaped up in him no resurgence of real hope until the event which gave him concrete reason, was almost upon them.

It was on a Saturday morning that Ridgely, who had been unbearably sullen of late, surly to Mrs. Tutwiler, non-communicative at table, given to not replying to questions put to him by Genevieve or Maravene, and even to Stopes himself, toward whom he usually observed a sort of debtor's courtesy, came home with what at first seemed a reappearance of the sore throat.

Lorenz, whose resemblance in appearance and behavior to his brother had always been something to remark, brought him home in a taxicab from a club where they had been lunching together on a courtesy card extended in the name of their late father. Stopes, by the way, had extended the money that had paid for the last bill of sundries

of luncheons, cigarettes, drinks, and theater tickets that had accumulated against the courtesy-card.

On this, of all Saturday afternoons, the raw February one when Ridgely came home with the stubborn throat symptoms reasserting themselves, the furnace had developed a defective flue and Mrs. Tutwiler, Genevieve, Maravene, and Stopes were gathered in Stopes' small sitting-room, the only room in the house that boasted a gas-grate.

It was seldom, except on the grounds of her embarrassing financial needs, that Maravene entered this room nowadays. Sitting before the small nervous flames of the gas-grate, ostensibly reading his afternoon paper while Genevieve and Mrs. Tutwiler discussed the exasperations of the furnace difficulties, and Maravene bent her long fair neck over a piece of handwork, an old game of pretence was staging itself behind Stopes' newspaper.

Maravene sitting there in that luminous area of placidity which her presence never failed to create, belonged to him. This was the hearth of his home. That pale nape of neck, beatific, sweet to him beyond the saying, was his to circle in necklace after necklace of kisses. Her nearness

and her dearness were privately and precious his own.

They might be sitting here casually in family circle, but once glance across the top of his newspaper into her eyes and they were in the private sanctity of their love. Presently they would be left alone—together——

Actually, though, one glance across the top of his newspaper and it was to see Maravene cocking her head for the sound of Ridgely's key in the lock. That cocked and listening look was in the manner of a woman waiting for her lover. Stopes did not deceive himself on that. They were in love, those two. Ridgely in a nervous, querulous way that kept him passionately her lover, and irritably her lover. Maravene, with the slow, tenacious quality that apparently kept her desirable to him.

And yet, from the time they put Ridgely to bed and covered him with blankets as chill set in, and Lorenz was dispatched post-haste for the doctor who did not respond to his telephone, a monstrous thought that grew into a hope, took form in Stopes.

Long before it had even begun to dawn upon any member of that household, it was clear to

Stopes that here was Ridgely's last illness. And suddenly it also dawned upon Stopes that, during these months of Maravene's marriage, he had been merely waiting. For what he was waiting, never had dared to take shape in his mind. Now it was quite clear. During all these weary months subsequent to the calamity of Maravene's marriage, Stopes had been waiting. Not hoping, but waiting.

And now that hope crept in, too, there came with it the crushing weight of self-disgust. He became anathema to himself. And as if to redeem the sorry spectacle that he presented, no act of reparation was too much.

Consultant doctors of first eminence were called in at Stopes' expense. He gave up his suite to nurses and slept on a lounge in the dining-room. But as the illness rose to its grave climax, days before the doctors gave their first intimations of danger, Stopes was braced for an event which, in spite of himself, was to cause life to begin to thaw and flow in his veins as if it had been frozen there since the day of the wedding of the girl who was about to be widowed.

Ridgely died at midnight, three weeks to the day, following the afternoon he had come home

with the relapse of the symptoms of septic sore throat. He died with his face against Maravene's hand as she slid it between his cheek and hot pillow. Stopes and Lorenz and a night nurse were in the room at the time.

It was incredible the placidity with which Maravene watched this man die. He was her lover, whose weakness had been dearer to her than his strength could have been. It was as if she had kissed him into his eternal sleep, her lips, unrepelled, resting against his long after the feeling of life had departed from them. It was with the same placidity that she waved aside the nurse, folded his hands, and drew up the sheet.

Heart-rending acts that should have been for other hands. What tears were shed came from Lorenz, who sobbed aloud, on his knees beside the bed.

When Maravene walked firmly and quietly out of the room after she had kissed her husband as if she would penetrate with him into the strange first moment of death, the dignity of her grief seemed as massive to Stopes as death itself.

She made it seem that same way to the household. The constrictures of money-pressure, the embarrassments of certain financial obligations,

business complications, the confusion of pressing debtors, were not permitted to so much as skirt the edge of the dignity of Maravene's grief.

Mrs. Tutwiler, who was a chicken without a head where there was need for self-possession, sobbed fresh hysteria as each fresh evidence of the confusion Ridgely had left in his wake began to present itself for adjustment to what, in Mrs. Tutwiler's opinion, was ironically called "the estate."

Estate indeed, as if Ridgely had left anything except debts.

For weeks, Lorenz, whose pale face seemed to have grown narrower since the death, kept so closely to his room that Mrs. Tutwiler would frankly paste her eye to the keyhole, in an effort to ascertain what could occupy a man there nineteen hours of his day. As a matter of fact, what occupied Lorenz was the simple act of lying flat on his back, his way of meeting catastrophe.

It was upon Genevieve and Stopes fell the burden of what adjustments could be made. This slender, twenty-three-year-old sister of Maravene, who was pretty enough after the fashion of the red-haired, with white skin occasionally spotted with a freckle, put her frail shoulder to

the wheel of this situation, and at least tried to drag some of the débris out of the main road.

She prevailed upon the eminent firm of lawyers which handled business for the Vaccine concern to adjust, for a nominal fee, some of the more pressing claims. She managed to recoup a pawned chest of fine old Clark silver by selling a sapphire-and-platinum set of Clark's cuff links, and it must be said for Genevieve that certain adjustments of her sister's tangled affairs, worked out by Genevieve's tidy mind, were quite brilliantly conceived.

For instance, she saved the Pinola concern from some of the onus of an ugly bankruptcy by jostling Lorenz, defunct so far as helpfulness was concerned, into unearthing a few documents which took wind out of the sails of some of the claims made by the Pineapple Growers' Company. She cleared her brother-in-law's name, and Lorenz's, too, for that matter, of involvement in a spurious but difficult claim that had to do with back rent on two of the Pinola stands, by a strategic return threat to produce documentary evidence which did not exist.

She was splendid throughout all this, impressing Stopes, who was easily irritated by a certain little

air of positiveness, characteristic of her, with the business brain which she had developed during her years with the Vaccine firm.

It was Stopes, however, who made whatever financial adjustments seemed imperative, sometimes without even telling Maravene or Mrs. Tutwiler, whose tears of gratitude were not only appalling to him, but so offensive that sometimes he was gruff with her.

"I know what I am doing, Mrs. Tutwiler. It's idiotic to cry over it. Cut it out. I expect Lorenz to pay back every penny. I am not giving."

"Yes, of course Lorenz will repay," was Maravene's large calm way of meeting these issues. "Lorenz has been stricken more than any of us realize. He and Ridgely were inseparable. He needs time to pull himself together."

Apparently he did, because the weeks dragged into months, during which time Genevieve still slept on the davenport in the parlor, and Mrs. Tutwiler's bewildered eye to the keyhole continued to reveal him lying under covers, hours on end.

It was a stricken household, however, only in the sense of the pressure of money circumstance, occasioned by what had been the complicated

financial procedure of Maravene's marriage. Outwardly, she demanded no special dispensation for her grief, although dear knows, both Mrs. Tutwiler and Genevieve gave of it freely.

She was the old pale, faintly luminous Maravene, a little washed-out, but intent on regaining her strength and taking a position in an office. It was as if she wore the death of her lover in a secret medallion under her heart. You sensed rather than saw her grief. Stopes, whose heart within him was raging these days of hope resuscitated, of boiling, buoyant restlessness, treated that grief with all the delicacy of which he was capable.

Watching him, with the careful passionate intensity with which she observed everything he did, the old nervous fear that had been laid by the marriage of Maravene began to reassert itself in Genevieve. Certainly, however, without outward reason. No matter what Genevieve may secretly, oh, so secretly, have suspected of the hopeless passion of Stopes for Maravene, nothing in his behavior, either before or after the marriage, had ever made the whole thing more definite than a mirage.

Just why the marriage of Maravene had given her reason to feel a sense of release in that locked,

tight, yearning little bosom of hers, was clear least of all to Genevieve herself. She only knew that something within her had eased. The pain of frustration was chronic and bitter within the area that boxed in her heart. There had never been a time, in all the years of her gnawing heart-ache for Stopes, that somewhere deep down in that pain she had not feared Maravene.

And Maravene's marriage, although it had not meant one iota of change in the demeanor of Stopes, had somehow given her that sense of release.

And now ——

Poor Genevieve! Her castles had always been mere ruins, but now here she was once more seated among the ruins of her ruins.

Was it possible that Stopes was aware of the widowed Maravene in a way that Genevieve would have given her soul to have him aware of her?

It was, of course. The marvel was that this could have still rested a question in Genevieve's mind, so outwardly casual Stopes had schooled himself to be where Maravene was concerned.

Heavy with intuition lay Genevieve's heart, but that was all.

The fact was that with life thawing in the frozen veins of Stopes, he was determined, after the decent period of Maravene's mourning, not to again play clown to destiny.

Stopes had let slip out of his hands, into the frailer, yes, and unworthier ones, of Ridgely, jewels of happiness that might just as well have studded life for him. He meant not to do it again.

Perhaps just not in those concrete terms did these resolutions harden into his mind and heart, but certainly this time his eye was fixed upon the jewel of his happiness. He meant not to let life elude him again, at least not without making tangible effort to capture it.

Stopes meant, after the decent period was past, to sweep Maravene off her feet by the quality of the declaration of his love. And what a love! He wanted to pour it out to her and deluge her in its leaping glory.

The secret inner tortuous places of Maravene's heart were not secret and inner to him. He knew and loved what made her bad as he knew and loved what made her glad. The labyrinths and quirks in her make-up, that had maddened and angered Ridgely, who had never understood, only loved her, were the tortuous places of her spirit,

into which he, Stopes, could creep with healing understanding.

No one but God and Stopes and Maravene knew these bad places in Maravene. Perhaps Maravene least of all. Certainly no one else in the world in which she moved, where she was just a rather unpleasantly quiet young woman with a curious quality of charm that was more puzzling than anything else.

Mrs. Tutwiler, who knew faintly the bad places in Maravene, used sometimes to think of her, crossing herself in the dead of night while she tried to worry it all out in bed, as a combination between the same nun and harlot, that had in her own unreal youth asserted themselves in her as she had struggled her way out of the novitiate.

Maravene, born of the conflict of passion and spirituality of those years, had been the sort of child who, when she had been good had been very, very good, and when bad had been worse than horrid.

Mrs. Tutwiler was not without her own secret sense of tortured responsibility for the specked places in her daughter's make-up, half sensed as they were by her.

And so it transpired that as the winter wore

into summer, the languid, stricken figure of Lorenz, endured by the household out of regard for Maravene, who nursed him as if doing vicarious service to his departed brother, slowly took on strength, and there was open talk now, between Mrs. Tutwiler and Genevieve, of evicting him so that Genevieve might creep back into her quarters.

The coming awake of Maravene, too, into much of her old loveliness, was something to remark. She cast aside black after a six-month and began to take pride once more in the pastel-colored little blouses with the straight mediæval neck lines that were so becoming to her.

She began answering advertisements for office work.

The pale luminosity of phosphorous-in-half-light, was out over her. She was maddening, she was desirable. She was attainable!

It was one year, lacking just two days, when, coming home from his office with a desire to have to himself that hour before dinner, an hour illuminated now with strange new contemplations, Stopes came upon the excited little knot of Mrs. Tutwiler, Maravene, and Lorenz standing in the

hallway. There was a smell of sweet peas. A clump of pink ones were at Maravene's belt.

She and Lorenz were in the act of announcing to Mrs. Tutwiler that they had just been married.

Lorenz and Maravene occupy the room once occupied by Maravene and his brother. The sound of the voices, low with caress, Lorenz's frequently querulous, Maravene's always on its plane, come through to Stopes and knock against his ear drums.

On Tuesday nights, Genevieve prepares the corned-beef hash. Certain inchoate hopes which had been flayed back into their corner by the death of Ridgely, have crept out again in her. She prepares Stopes' favorite dish with the curved close hands of one whose task is sweet.

There is the same financial strain in the household, because as a damp mildewing February comes around, the bad place in Lorenz's lung is bleeding again and his position as bond salesman has been temporarily given up.

Almost every few weeks now, Maravene raps, in her hesitating way on Stopes' door, what nervous distaste she must be feeling lying deep beneath the snow of her placidity.

Temporary embarrassment. Silly old lung. Repay with interest. Wretched New York Februarys. Just a hundred to tide over ——

Sometimes in his hour before dinner, Stopes finds himself sitting erect, with the hope that Lorenz's voice, as it comes through to him, will be querulous or even sharp. Because these are usually the occasions of Maravene's knock at his door, needing him.

One evening, a Tuesday, by the way, the bleeding place in Lorenz's lung puts him to bed.

Genevieve, in the kitchen, preparing Stopes' favorite dish, is wild at the interruption of being hastily dispatched for the doctor.

Lorenz has had a bad hemorrhage! Voices rush through the corridors of the house. Lorenz has had a bad hemorrhage!

Seated beside his reading lamp, his copy of *Barnaby Rudge* unopened at his elbow, Stopes suddenly lifts his head, as if he has been called.

The Young Prince

THE first time Lydia beheld her son drape a bit of apple-green silk, left over from a bridesmaid's frock, around the wire figure of her dress-making form, she reached out and plucked him off as you would a burr.

"Bernard, don't you ever let me see you do that again."

Tish, remnant of the days when the late Major Yardsley had been stationed at El Paso, raised two pallid and horny palms and rolled two eyes that were like black circles of carbon paper pasted against white.

"Dat chile's chip off de ole block of his Mam-mie, I'll say, Miss Lydie."

"There's nothing funny in that, Tish. Children who imitate everything they see are little monkeys. Boys don't play at dressmaking, Bernard. That's sissified."

Sissified, a word destined to become as cut-tingly sibilant as a buzz-saw to Bernard, had not yet made its dent. There was to come a day

when in the household it became unsayable. But by that time the mere saying of it no longer mattered so much, because long before Bernard was fifteen it was more a part of the sensation of a lodestone or a lump lodging in her throat than it was a word.

Children frequently hurled the noun of it at Bernard. It made a wildcat of Lydia. Once she had slapped a small boy resoundingly across the face for hissing it out at Bernard as they passed along the street. An enraged note had followed from the neighborhood boy's outraged mother, to which Lydia had written apology.

Such an outburst, striking a child across the face, was so alien to her nature, that looking back, it seemed to her that some third and mysterious hand must have darted out from her subconsciousness and struck at that boy. Bernard, on the other hand, had only increased his speed and hurried along without glancing back, which in Lydia's secret and tormented opinion, was as strange a thing for the son of Major Yardsley to have done as it was for her to have struck out.

Well, what could you expect? was Lydia's excited and sometimes almost hysterical fashion of

talking down, to herself, these forbidden thoughts when they crept on her unawares. You could not hope to rear a boy, in a city, and of all places around a dressmaking establishment, and make a man of him overnight.

Then this only-child business. Wasn't there a scientific theory to the effect that only children, because of their enforced loneliness and association with their elders, were—yes, yes, yes—and so on and so on and so on.

Now, if the Major had only been spared, all might have been so different. Ah, there was a venturesome spirit for you! Alas, too venturesome! Lydia had first clapped eyes on him when she was a seminary girl in Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis, and he had been stationed at Jefferson Barracks. They had met at a Tree Day reception. He had been in full uniform.

Sometimes it seemed to Lydia that her marriage of eight months to the Major had been a dream that ended, or had it begun, with the message that followed the battle of Château Thierry.

He had died in action. She kept the splotched and crumbled message in a small carved sandalwood box. Sometimes she showed it to Bernard.

That was what made it seem a strange thing, somehow, for the son of Major Yardsley to have hurried along without glancing back, that time the sibilant aspersion had hopped off the lips of the bad boy as Bernard had passed him by and the wildcat had leaped up in Lydia.

It made her secretly resolve to become a little strict with Bernard. To harden him a bit. To refuse to permit him to hang around the house after school hours. To send him out to join the other boys at play, instead of passing his time in the room where Lydia and her one assistant were busy at dressmaking, or tagging around the kitchen after Tish, who doled him cookies from a brown crock which she kept beyond his reach.

Lydia loved to have Bernard about. There was something sedative about him. He never seemed to want or desire to a sufficient degree to make him unruly. He was a satisfying child to have around and could stand at the window for half an hour watching the street scenes quietly and without any of the noisy, jumpy impulses of most boys to be in and out. Sometimes he would lie under the sewing table on his stomach, chin propped on palms, and improvise little chants.

"The flow-er said to the lit-tle dog,
I would rath-er be me than you—ooo

Cats are nice but I hate mice
I —— hate —— mice ——"

Lydia, who from time to time, when she felt strangely bothered about Bernard, had read books on child culture and psychology, would often listen to these and try to analyze them.

"I want to sit in a golden spoon
And eat little cakes the shape of the moon."

Now what could that one mean? You were supposed to be able to draw important deductions from unconscious revelations like this, which would give you the private key to the innermost thoughts of your child.

It was a pretty enough little thought, that one about the spoon and moon, but somehow, from her reading, Lydia would have preferred that Bernard's mind ran to the husky themes of piracy or conquest by land or air.

Frequently, as she sat stitching, stitching, Lydia found herself leaning forward, with an almost breathless eagerness, for some such note in the chantings of her son as he lay beneath the sewing table.

"The garden was filled with roses
That the pansies made faces at."

Now what kind of thoughts were those for a boy of eleven! Why, even as Bernard chanted them her neighbor's son, Bleeker, could be heard breaking a broomstick bronco down in the yard below.

"Bernard, why don't you run out and play?"

"I am playing, Mother."

Lydia found herself passionately wanting Bernard to be breaking broomstick broncos in the yard below. She used to insist upon his going down, only to have him come trailing in a little later, pale, and sometimes with evidence of blackened tear stains along his cheeks.

It was no use. Bernard hated breaking broncos down in the back yard with Bleeker Sheehan or Rodney Stuart.

Tish used to fold him to her as if he had been absent over a long period of time when he came wearily indoors from these enforced forays into the small-boy outside world, and wash the black streaks off his cheeks, and with her wide, pink lips against his ear, mumble treasons against Lydia.

"Mah young-prince honey-chile ain't got ways dat fits in wid dem thar devils-on-wheels of boys

down thar. If Tish ketches one of dem good-for-nothin' red Injuns a-layin' a han' to her boy, Tish'll parboil 'em in oil, dat's what Tish'll do. Your mah hadn't ought to think she's a-making a man out of you by sending you down thar to get pea-shot at."

Pea-shot would send Bernard into a hysteria of dread. He dreaded for his eyes. He batted them wildly, covered them with his hands, and ran shouting and shuddering up the back stairs.

Well, Lydia used to reason excitedly to herself on these occasions when, under sling-shot from pestiferous boys, he used to run screaming into the house, what could you expect? Bleeker was just naturally a blustering fellow and Rodney's own blood uncle was none other than Tex Stuart, the light-weight champion . . . or was it the heavy-weight? More probably heavy.

Boys of just ordinary stripe could be expected to stand up under a spatter of shot. Highly strung, sensitive boys were another matter. More than probably the Major himself had hated pea-shot. Oh dear! there had been so little time before Château Thierry in which to become acquainted. . . .

"Shh-h-h, Bernard. Get quiet, darling. You

don't have to go out and play any more today. Tish will take you out in the kitchen and give you a cookie. Won't you, Tish?"

"Honey-chile, just you cum wid Tish. I hope to de Lawd de four-eyed heebiejeebies gits every one of dem dare-devils what pesters mah chile."

When Tish's hand, which was the color of pale jade on the inside and a corduroyed brown on the outer, closed over Bernard's, it could cause rest and security to flow their ways back into his wildly-beating heart.

After a time, Lydia ceased to command Bernard to go out and play, because usually when he came home from the public school which he attended two blocks away, there were such tired lines about his mouth that Lydia did not quite dare. Not that he ever complained, or that there were complaints from school, but for some reason, unmentionable even to herself, Lydia never inquired or attempted to meet his teachers. The reports which he brought home were fairly good, studies average, deportment, for the most part, excellent.

Again for a reason she could not quite analyze, Lydia shrank before the consistent excellency of the deportment. Bleeker's mother complained bit-

terly of her boy's low conduct grades, but Lydia, who sewed for her, felt a sort of secret and vicious exultancy in her manner.

"Boys will be boys, Mrs. Yardsley. Isn't it true?"

"Yes, yes, yes, Mrs. Sheehan." Now what did she mean by that?

Just the same, Lydia did no longer drive Bernard down into the yard to play with these boys who would be boys. Besides, the customers enjoyed him around the house. He was rather a beautiful boy, with contemplative dark eyes and long, smooth cheeks. Eager to please, too, and willing at errands.

But one day a Mrs. Bok, a large young woman who could have afforded Paris clothes but swore by the way in which Lydia could fit her heavy figure, took exception. Standing in her underbodice before a long mirror, while Lydia, on her knees, her mouth full of pins and her pretty ash-colored hair awry, was turning up a hem, Mrs. Bok started, recoiled, and threw a scarf over her shoulders as Bernard entered the room.

"Please don't let your boy come in while I'm being fitted, Mrs. Yardsley. Such a great big boy—it's not nice ——"

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Bok. Bernard is such a child in his ways we forget he's nearly thirteen. Bernard, run out and play." But at the stricken look which followed that command there was born full upon her the most acute awareness of her new problem.

Bernard, whom the women customers had loved to pet, was outgrowing his environment. Along the narrow, pale panel of his cheeks was the beginning of a light fuzz. He had already approached his mother for long trousers. He carried a small coin purse by now for his own spending money, and took off his cap gravely to small neighborhood girls whom he passed in the street.

Mrs. Bok had been quite right. Lydia was grateful to her for jerking her to this awareness of her son's fine and normal maturity which had been embarrassing to her as a customer.

For a moment, the exigency of giving up the dressmaking establishment flashed over Lydia. No doubt about it, this was no environment for a growing boy. Lydia hated more and more Bernard's tendency to putter with bits of silk; to make small and amusing character dolls out of clothespins and scraps of material that fell from under her scissors. A boy did not have much

opportunity to develop into a boy's boy in such an environment.

The small pension paid her by the government was less than they could live along on, without some additional source even in circumstances rather more than modest. But there was always the alternative of doing handiwork for the Women's Exchanges. The first few years of Bernard's life she had managed it that way, occupying a small room in a lodging-house and sewing while her son learned to crawl.

Her natural aptitude with the needle asserting itself, she had been able to earn the much-needed margin to her income by making satin flowers, lamp shades, bed jackets, and boudoir caps. From there, the step of branching out into dressmaking was a logical one.

By the act of moving from El Paso back to St. Louis she had known as a girl when the late Major had been stationed at Jefferson Barracks, and announcing to a few of her erstwhile friends her intention of setting up dressmaking, Lydia within the first twelvemonth had been able to double her income.

Friends, both in town and out in the suburb of Ferguson, where she had spent her childhood

previous to the death of her parents, remembered her pretty aptitude with the needle, and rallied around.

Her present scale of life in the apartment that occupied the upper floor of a two-family building on a nicely laid out residential street known as Vernon Avenue, was the result of Lydia's ability, by now, to almost quadruple the income derived from the pension.

Tish, who had been maid-of-all-work in the El Paso household during those strangely unreal and cherished months of the Major's lifetime, and who had held Bernard in her chocolate-colored arms the first hour of his life, had been sent for as the dressmaking end of the establishment grew and Lydia was no longer able to sandwich in her domestic chores between fittings.

There was a helper in the sewing-room, too, by now, and if Lydia had been ambitious for still further extension, one of her patrons, a Mrs. Hammerschlakker, of Ferguson, had twice offered to back her to the extent of twenty-five hundred dollars in setting up a downtown establishment.

Lydia, to whom the idea of the dressmaking business on a larger scale was not tenable, found the question of discontinuing it entirely to be

even more untenable. Why, its chief virtues all along had been the advantages the increased income could make possible for Bernard. His education. His home. His opportunities in the vocation or profession he would ultimately choose for himself. Now that he was approaching his middle teens, it seemed highly impracticable to even contemplate a return to a more restricted mode of living.

Lydia and Bernard could no longer occupy one small room in a lodging-house. Besides, that environment might present even greater disadvantages than the present one of dressmaker's twaddle, silk, drapes, and Tish's extravagant adoration of this child whom she had held in the jade palm of her hand the first hour of his life.

There was no evading the fact that Tish was bad for Bernard or that she was fastened into that household like a bracket to its wall. His unspoken desire seemed to flow into her consciousness, his unexpressed wish was her command. Racked, exalted, terrified, transported by the easy fears, superstitions, and taboos of her race, Bernard's timidities were her timidities; his fears were her fears ten times intensified.

She knew his fear of the dark, and out of her

own money bought him pocket searchlights for those dread occasions when his mother purposely sent him through the unlighted house of an evening, or made him enter first if they had been out. She bought him a night-light with a battery that slid under the pillow, because, lying in her meager cubbyhole that opened off the kitchen, Tish knew what tremors were Bernard's, lying in his room.

Only, being Tish, she was openly at liberty to burn the one electric bulb her room afforded. Tish did not matter enough for it to be shameful for her to be afraid.

How passionately and how secretly she and Bernard shared their tremors. She knew how he dreaded the gnawing sound mice made at paper bags; how he feared lightning and the rude, slanting glances of threats from the street boys. She knew his dread of the morning plunge into the cold tub his Mother insisted upon, and secretly diluted it with warm to allay the shock.

Known to Tish were Bernard's horror of the sight of blood, the swaying motion of a rowboat, his panic at the creaking noises the woodwork could make on those occasional evenings when he and Tish were left at home when Lydia, looking

lovely, accompanied a client or a customer to a theater or a concert. Filled with dreads, these two could huddle together, unrelaxed, until the blessed sound of Lydia's key turning in the lock.

Yes, Tish was bad for Bernard, Lydia knew that. And yet, the idea of robbing Bernard of his home and his opportunities for education by abandoning the business at this time was surely the most impractical way out of the difficulty.

It was then the plan of sending Bernard to a military academy dawned in slow inspiration upon Lydia.

She marveled she had not thought of it before. The Major had been educated at a military academy. Lydia's best girlhood friend, Martha MacCree, who had also married an army officer stationed at Manila, was the daughter of one of the late head masters of a military academy near St. Louis.

It was there that Lydia decided to send Bernard. She had spent many a week-end at the lovely old academy situated on the bluffs of the Mississippi River, with Martha when they had been girls together at the Ferguson Seminary. Many a cadet had been beau to her and Martha. Manly little

fellows in blue-and-gray uniforms and caps whose visors seemed to touch the tips of their noses.

Such a place would be the making of Bernard. It would awaken in him some of the latent qualities of his father, the Major, which must lurk within him.

It hurt Lydia, who had a way of carrying misery with a high hand, probably more than anything that had ever happened to her, when the time came for putting into execution this parting from her son. He took it so stoically, accepting it as a matter of course, except that there were little pools of dread in his eyes that seemed to Lydia to change their color from brown to black.

Tish was openly rebellious, in fact, hysterical. On one occasion, when Bernard's small store of supplies prescribed in the academy catalogue was being assembled and a pair of stiff gray army blankets had arrived as part of the equipment of the young cadet, it appeared to Lydia that this time, her frequent threat of dismissing Tish for her incorrigible tendency to overstep her position in the household, would have to be put into execution.

"Tish, you are to keep out of matters that do not directly concern you, or leave."

"But, Miss Lydia, you cain't send dat chile out of dis house to sleep on sech. Bernard has got de skin of a young prince and dose dar blankets is gwine to tear it offn his body. Youse fixin' to kill dat chile of yours, Miss Lydia, tryin' to make a sow's ear out of a silk purse—dat's what you is. Bernard ain't got no soljer blood in him lak de Major had, Miss Lydia. I knows dat chile better'n he knows hisself. You don't."

Didn't she! It seemed to Lydia that she did. Passionately she prayed to know him. To help him. To let her love guide him out of the troubled meadows that had been his childhood.

The military-academy experiment, however, proved to not be a success. At the end of the first semester Bernard was returned home in the care of one of the head masters. There was nothing, he explained kindly and tactfully to Lydia, that could be said against Bernard as a lad and student—he was a good average both—except—er—perhaps certain diffidences that time would doubtless overcome.

"It would be casting no aspersion on your boy to say he has not in him the making of, let us say, a physician or a mining engineer. That is all we are saying to you in returning Bernard. He not

only, in our opinion, is not the stuff of which cadets are made, but has not in him the ultimate making of a soldier—assuming that might be your ambition for your boy.”

Listening, Lydia realized with a finality. It was the last attempt she ever made to fan the flame of her hopes that he follow in his father's footsteps and carry on that career from where it had been so precipitously ended.

To her secret joy at having the boy home again, to the constantly reiterated outbursts of Tish's garrulous delight, the little household reverted to routine.

“Didn't I tell you dat chile wasn't one of dem soljer boys dat follows de tip of his cap? Bernard got moh sense up his little sleeve dan a whole regiment of soljer boys wid their coat shoulders padded with tennis balls. Bernard ain't got no use for killin' . . . Bernard hates blood—he's lak me—de Lord neber meant blood to show except on his blessed body ——”

Whatever of scars and bruises and heart hurt Bernard brought home from the academy, no inkling of it ever left his lips. If some of the residuum of that experience remained in the small

pools of his eyes, it was discernible only to his mother.

There was a burn on Bernard's smooth upper left arm after his return from the academy that looked as if it might have been branded or tattooed there.

To Tish's loud outcry when she beheld it, he said something about hazing. Lydia never inquired further, but bitterly she knew. The boys had been rough on Bernard.

What she did not know was that, after a ducking into the turgid swirl of the Mississippi, along Bernard's arm had been branded with an improvised tatoo device a single letter concocted by the cadets in high glee. It was the first letter of a laughable Greek word for donkey and it did not admit him to a Greek-letter society.

More and more semblance of peace, however, came to settle down over Lydia after this Academy experience. She could not look at her boy and fail to feel pride in the splendid kind of young manhood that was beginning to manifest itself.

When he was fifteen he had already almost attained his full height, and, if a bit lanky, there was something of grace and poise about Bernard's bearing. The women customers admired his pale

narrow face. The long planes of his cheeks, the firm lips, and the dark and velvety eyes distinguished him from the more usual types of boys about.

If Bernard had displayed the slightest aptitude for the piano, the palette, or the scalpel, all of Lydia's dull fears about him would have been dispelled in the luminous hope that here was an artist. In fact, after the return from the Academy, rather than force the boy back into the public school from which he so obviously shrank, Lydia prevailed upon Bernard to take piano lessons and to attend the School of Design. Both of which he did, but only after a fashion.

There was no evading it. The sewing-room attracted Bernard. Sometimes he whisked fabrics from his mother's experimenting fingers and wound them swiftly and surely into the design for which she had been fumbling. She came almost unconsciously to depend upon him for draping and plaiting, and his discerning and sensitive eye was quick to detect a flaw in the hang of a skirt or the fall of a drape.

Well, why not? Why not? The great dress-makers of the world were men. It was only in an insular community like theirs that there was any-

thing the least bit strange about a lad whose propensities turned toward the art of human attire. Yes, sir, just that! The ART of human attire.

It took an artist, and don't you forget it, to achieve a plait that could make Mrs. Bok's round back appear straight, or hone down the silhouette line of Mrs. Hammerschlakker. No one knew it, but Bernard and Bernard alone had designed those three bridesmaid frocks for the Sainsepool wedding that had brought in more new customers than had ever bombarded the modest doors of the Vernon Avenue flat before. Well, what have you to say to that? Which was better, to have a good-for-nothing fellow for a son like Bleeker, who was discharged from every position his father obtained for him, and who got his father's sedan into an ugly smash by stealing the car for a secret joy ride, or a quiet, graceful lad who was a comfort and a companion to his mother, to say nothing of a help to her in her work.

Not that Bernard was immune to the opposite sex. What a twittering there had been in the house those days when the bridesmaids were being fitted! Boy-conscious twittering, Lydia called it.

With a sense of thanksgiving that made her seem loathsome even to herself, Lydia beheld her

son one day making shy overtures to the daughter of one of the neighbors. How sweet! How right! How normal! That evening she gave Bernard a dollar to take the girl to the corner ice-cream parlor, ashamed of the fact that it was done almost in a spirit of thanksgiving.

Indeed, by the time he was seventeen, Bernard was already quite a beau with the girls. They liked his lithe, slim appearance, his considerate ways, his long pale face with the hint of sideburns down the narrow cheeks, his habit of commenting upon their clothes, and his gentle ways of consideration with older folks, their parents.

The fact that the boys gave him wide berth, the parents of the girls were inclined to take more seriously than the girls themselves, who were given to easily falling in love with Bernard Yardsley, whose finger nails were always so nicely cleaned and pared, who frankly admitted to the rather precious trait of feeling a little squeamish at the sight of blood, and who was not ashamed, as their brothers were, to lift baby sister out of her perambulator and dandle her for the pleasure of it.

Bernard's middle teens were comparatively quiet years with Lydia. A fear of some unmentionable sort had been laid. She ceased to urge

upon him the outdoor sports of tennis on the municipal courts, handball, or even golf. There was no law said a man had to be athletic. He took to dancing, and that proved his body grace. By the time he was eighteen she began to feel quite a pride in dressing herself in an evening gown that revealed her still fine shoulders, parting her ash-blond hair in the severe Rossetti fashion that he liked, and having her handsome young son accompany her to a concert or theater. He wore his first dress clothes well.

"Lak a young prince," cried Tish, and rocked her body and her hands.

But in a dozen ways Tish still catered to her secret awareness of what was what with her young prince. She knew how he still hated to enter a dark room and, shuddering with distaste for it herself, would hobble ahead of him to turn on the light with an agility that was remarkable as the years began to cripple her and knot her joints. She still made a great show of drawing his bath cold, and then secretly diluting it. She cut her hand in the meat-grinder once while Bernard was in the kitchen, and thrust it behind her back to let it bleed unstanched until he had left the room. She would disarrange the Indian clubs his mother

had given him for his eighteenth birthday, as if to indicate they had been in recent use.

Sly old Tish. Her brown trail was everywhere through that household.

What happened in the end was that Mrs. Hammerschlagger's backing—repaid, by the way, the third year—did finally set them up in a downtown dressmaking establishment which consisted of a loft in the fashionable shopping district, which was divided into a pretty violet-and-mauve showroom, three tiny fitting-rooms, the rear half constituting one large brick-walled workroom, where three helpers were kept humming away at machines all day.

Bernard was "one of the floor." He greeted customers, showed them the fashion books, suggested fabrics, designs, colors, and wrote down measurements, at his mother's dictation, into a blank book.

Lydia's dressmaking establishment, "Yardsley, Inc.," came to be known as a first-rate place. Meanwhile, they moved into a larger flat in a pleasanter neighborhood, known as Westminster Place, where the front room was now a modishly furnished library, instead of a workshop.

It was along about the year that they had fin-

ished paying off Mrs. Hammerschlagger that another small windfall came the way of the Yardsleys.

Out of Bernard's favorite evening pastime, of twiddling around with the silks and various fabrics, had grown a remarkable aptitude for making dolls. One evening he contrived a brown-taffeta one in the image of Tish that was fairly startling in its amusing verisimilitude.

Next, Bernard tried one of his mother, achieving with the same exactitude out of a rag, a hank of hair, and a daub of paint the soft, rounded form, the heart-shaped face, and the low ash-blond hair. Next he did one of himself, a caricature of long legs, pointed face, and black-satin hair.

In no time at all Bernard was selling these character dolls to local department stores for as high as forty and fifty dollars a piece. He made them three or four feet in height, often in the image of some local celebrity, or again, improvisations such as a Spanish dancer, a traffic policeman, or a fat politician. They were handsome affairs, well made, every inch by hand, the features cunningly painted by a water-color process patented in Bernard's name.

Show Lydia a better son than hers! Not so easy. There was still defiance in these confabs Lydia had with herself, chiefly after she was in bed and the workaday had folded its wings about her.

Lydia was still unconsciously on the defensive about Bernard, as if in the darkness, when these contemplations rose before her, she could see derisive faces swimming about her. The derisive faces of the men who never mingled with Bernard or invited him to their games or clubs. The derisive faces of the girls as they grew older and began to prefer the boys who went in for aviation, engineering, and the so-called men's jobs.

Well—just the same, show Lydia a better son than hers! Not so easy.

A crisis came, like a bolt out of the clear sky.

One evening, as Lydia and Bernard were having supper at a café on Delmar Avenue that was popular in the residential district as a place where you could go Sunday evening for *chile con carne*, something of so curious and startling a nature occurred, that it seemed to Lydia her very heart had been caught in the grip of a human hand.

During one of the cabaret numbers, a girl im-

personator of some cleverness did several imitations of stage and screen celebrities. As an encore, she came bounding out to the platform in the guise of a boy in natty evening clothes, a crooked cane under one arm, and an opera hat on the back of her slicked black head. As if her resemblance to Bernard were not enough, she began to sing in a falsetto voice so undeniably his, that it was as if Lydia could not drag her agonized eyes away from her plate, even after the spatter of applause had died down and they had picked their way out of the crowded restaurant.

Accident pure and simple, a chance quality of manner and voice that was Bernard all over again. Perhaps he had not even noticed. She dared not let her eyes find his.

All the way home, which was a few blocks across car tracks and streets of small lighted shops, she kept up a quick and garrulous patter. The chile con carne had not been so good this time—too hot. The entertainment had been dull. Tosca's was a better place for Sunday-night supper. So few good restaurants in town. Now they say that in New York . . .

Something leaden and dulled was walking beside Lydia. She knew it with her instinct. She

knew it with the sudden fears that were plying around her heart. And she was right. Words were about to be spoken between Lydia and her son that had never found their way to the rims of their hearts, much less to their lips.

And they were to be spoken without ado of preamble, because no sooner were they in the house, Lydia forging ahead to turn on the switch of the living-room as she had an unconscious habit of doing, than Bernard, who had been a sealed tomb to her compared with what was about to happen now, threw himself to his knees and, with his arms about her knees, as she stood without even her hat removed, began to sob out his heart-sickening question.

"Mother, Mother, what is the matter with me?"

"Bernard," she said, very quietly, placing her hands lightly upon his hair as if they were not too agitated for endurance, "what a question!"

"Don't, don't, don't!" he cried in three sort of hoarse croaks. "Don't try that on me, Mother. If you don't tell me, I think I can't live another day of it. Am I—like that—tonight ——"

"Like—what?"

"Don't pretend to me, Mother!" he cried, and sprang to his feet and caught her by the shoul-

ders so that her face was foreshortened and toward the light.

"Bernard," she said, calmly, through an old instinct to be his disciplinarian, "don't speak to me in that tone."

"Then you must tell me the truth, Mother. Why am I like—I am?" he said, and laid his hand across his eyes as if to press back a hateful vision.

"Like what, Bernard?" she said, too frightened by the tone of his question to keep her voice up to the standard of steadiness she strained for.

He stood and ground his face against his hand.

"Like—what—son?"

"Don't—don't make me say it."

"But, Bernard, I don't understand."

"Like a Sissie—there, if I must. Like a Sissie. Like a Sissie. Like a—a gi—a Sissie. In my voice. In my manner. In my ways. I am a man at heart, Mother. A fellow like any other fellow. It's the shell of me that makes me ridiculous. I know. I know. Don't think I haven't known it all my life. Or should I call it all my hell, instead of all my life?"

Her throat closed like a gate, jamming back the words she might have uttered.

"Mother, can't you help me?" he said, so quietly that it made her quiet.

"Yes, Bernard. That is the chief meaning life has for me—to be able to help you."

"Then begin by being honest with me."

"Yes, Bernard."

"What is there about me that has—has always made fellows torment me?"

"Why, Bernard, you're supersensitive!"

"Cut that. Cut that. You promised to be honest."

"They torment you because you are—different. I mean ——"

"I'm a man. With a man's desires."

Thank God for that, went streaming through her brain, making her, as always, loathe herself for the thought.

"Of course, Bernard, of course. I meant superficially, you are of more delicate fiber."

"That doesn't mean anything to me. Speak out. Is it my high voice that you call more delicate fiber? Speak out, Mother."

"Don't ——"

"Is it?"

"In a way."

"God gave me that! I've tried to get it down.

I've suffered to get it down. If anybody is to be ridiculed, God's the one. I don't mean that!"

"Bernard!"

"I've tried, Mother. I've tried to get it down. There's nothing I haven't tried," he said, and thrust three fingers inside his collar. It seemed to Lydia, standing there before him, that her pity would make her faint or drown in some sea of her tears or his tears or both their tears.

"Can't you see, Mother," he said, and looked at her with his hands hanging loosely at his sides, "God made that sort of a job of me."

"Mother thinks it's a good job, Bernard."

"Don't do that," he said, and stepped back angrily from her pity.

"I just mean, son, it isn't the voice—alone ——"

"Then what, Mother? You promised to be honest. Nothing can help but that. What—else?"

"It's just, son—I must keep saying it—you are of more delicate fiber."

"Cut that out. I can't live on if I don't get the straight of it. Why do the fellows treat me like—I guess I can't say it."

"It's because ——"

"Why?"

"Because, for instance—their sports do not interest you ——"

"Yes? Yes?"

"Boys are great mimics, Bernard. They go in herds. They cannot understand a boy not taking to the sports they are trained to be most fond of—oh, like baseball and tennis and gymnasium and swimming ——"

"That's why you've been forever buying me Indian clubs and tennis racquets and getting me to enroll at gym ——"

"Yes, Bernard, I thought it might help you to ——"

"I know. I know. I've tried, too."

"I know that, too, son. I'm not blaming—only ——"

"Mother?"

"Yes."

"Mother, shall I tell you something?"

"Yes, yes, son, everything."

"Not everything. Most of it is too terrible. The awfulness and the humiliation of being—me. But, Mother, that time at the Academy—you remember how suddenly I came home?"

"Yes," said Lydia, her voice not audible.

"It was because, Mother—I wanted to kill my—

self—just on account of things you're saying now."

"You wanted what?" she said, uncomprehending.

"Oh, I don't know—a little crazy, I guess. . . . Rope in a barn. . . . The colonel who brought me home walked in on me. He was a brick about never telling why—or anything. He kept his word. But I tried up there, Mother, to play around in everything with the fellows. I tried terribly, because 'way back there, I knew all the things you're telling me now. It wasn't a go—gym—or baseball. But it was me trying to swim that seemed to get the fellows' goat most. They kept ducking me, because I guess they saw how against the grain it was. Ever know what it is to feel suffocated with water, Mother? It kind of grabs you by the heart and pushes in your eyes and gets you around the neck. The suffocating part is the worst. I couldn't stand it. I couldn't stand being a swimmer and I couldn't stand not being a swimmer. I've been through it all, Mother."

"Yes. Yes. Yes," she said, tapping the toe of her shoe and looking at swimming space above his head. "Yes. Yes. Yes."

There were apparently moments in life that were simply unthinkable, until they came to be endured. This was one of them. And yet there she stood, tapping her pretty slippers and coining the yes—yes—yesses.

"I've been through every kind of hell a fellow like me has got to go through, if he is to live at all. If I only just knew, Mother, what is to be done. *What is to be done?*"

"Nothing need be done, Bernard. Mother is satisfied."

He took her again by the shoulders, quietly.

"Answer me this," he said, and forced her eyes. "Would you rather I would change, if I could, into—just any other fellow, like a salesman or an aviator or a crack athlete or—an all-around chap? Or would you rather I'd just be me?"

For the life of her, she could not have lied to him. Her mouth closed and fell like a gate on a loose hinge.

"Mother!"

"Bernard, you are the finest boy in the world. Mother knows that. But maybe, if you were some of the things we've been talking about, the world would come to know that, too, a little bet-

ter than—it seems to me, now. Why not try, son?”

“You’re wonderful, Mother. I feel helped,” he said, and kissed her and walked out of the library into his bedroom, where Tish had a light burning for him.

The gate had snapped closed again, securely, relentlessly, infallibly, and with her judgment and common sense Lydia knew it and forced herself to let that night and its consequences sink into silence.

Not that its consequences were not apparent. It seemed to Lydia that right off, there was something new and elastic in the manner and the very walk of her son. If she had dreaded, through that long night following their talk, to face a new day for her son, if her tears had soaked into her pillow and her sobs been stifled there, the dreaded new day brought a cheerful and even sprightly Bernard.

In the following weeks, Indian clubs were unearthed and swung to Tish’s loud outcries of fear for chandeliers and dour anticipations of callous places on his hands. Three afternoons a week Bernard left the dressmaking establishment an

hour earlier for the municipal tennis courts, and on Saturday afternoons he usually invited one of the several girls whom he took about occasionally, to attend the baseball game. A cloud was rolling back off the heart of Lydia and she had the wit to remain silent and watch and wait and sometimes pray.

About this time, the advent of Nicola came into the lives of Lydia and Bernard, so propitiously that Lydia was inclined to regard it a little mystically, as if a conciliatory fate had leaned into the picture of their destinies.

There came from the Martha MacCree of her girlhood, with whom Lydia still corresponded, a letter from Manila, frankly inviting Lydia to invite Martha's daughter Nicola to spend a year "in the States" with her mother's old school friend. Its frankness went further. Martha begged Lydia to take Nicola as a boarder. Major MacCree joined his wife in urging Lydia to accept their suggestion in the spirit of old friends and permit their daughter, who had just finished high school in Manillatto, to enjoy the benefits of a change of environment.

Of course, Lydia did nothing of the sort so far as the spirit of the invitation was concerned. She

wrote eagerly inviting Nicola to be her guest. It was embarrassing and unthinkable to accept her as a boarder. There was a pretty little guest chamber in the apartment yearning for just such an occupant as Nicola was sure to be. If, as her mother suggested, Nicola needed "toning down," she was to undergo that heroic treatment as guest.

It was a pleasant idea all around. From the two or three photographs that Martha had sent on from time to time, Nicola was unusually personable. More than ever, her coming at this time seemed mystically providential to Lydia. What an opportunity to get Bernard further out of himself! What if . . .

A thought flashed through Lydia's mind that was radiant. Nicola and Bernard. Why not! But in any event, this was the opportunity to force Bernard more and more out of himself. They could play tennis together—dance—swim——

The coming of Nicola was an opportunity to get Bernard out of himself that succeeded. She was a dynamo of a young miss in a manner her photographs had never succeeded in conveying. Apparently no up-and-coming phase of American girlhood had failed to penetrate into the urban

life of those Pacific colonies where Nicola had first seen the light.

In fact, it might be said that she went the average American eighteen-year-old girl one better. Slim, chic, self-sufficient, trained to the out-of-doors, ultra-modern in dress and in manner and in a cunning, if shrewd, sophistication, she dawned upon the Yardsleys like a wink of bright lightning, foretelling, as it were, no end of disturbances to the calm atmosphere of that small *ménage*.

There was never a moment when Bernard hesitated on the brink of his capitulation. He was plunged into it from the moment she stepped off the train, with a huge green-and-gold hat-box on one arm and a handbag the shape of a Teddy bear on the other. From the start, she was an unqualified parcel of delight, pranks, and outrageousness.

She established herself in a day. Scattered letters of introduction around town from half the army colony in Manila, kissed Lydia seven times before she would ever consent to sit down to a meal, set up a most rousing and outspoken hatred for Tish—which was heartily reciprocated—and frankly admitted that Bernard was her idea of

the young prince the old black crocodile in the kitchen was always yammering about.

Overnight, as it were, the quiet flat of the Yardsleys became, thanks to the scattered letters of introduction, a rendezvous for a young set they had never even known, except through society columns and the indirect gossip of the dress-making establishment. The telephone became a howling dervish demanding Nick.

The MacCree girl was success instantaneous. And what made it all the more unqualified was that she made conquest of men and girls alike. She was no mere man's girl, leaving the women to form a little island of resentment by themselves. She had a way with her that went all the gamut. Sweet, Cute, Darling, Dandy, Corking, Magnetic, Peach, and Best Ever were some of the local phraseologies applied to the socially winning Miss MacCree.

Nicola, diplomat, coquette, angler for everyone's favor, made no secret of her methods.

"I like to be liked. I'd sooner tell a white lie than blacken a person's happiness. What's the use of breaking a date with a fellow and telling him it's because you want to keep it with another,

when headaches and sick aunts might just as well be of some use in the world?"

Bernard could not keep his eyes off her. Her twittering mannerisms delighted him. He thought her adorable and told her so, and Nicola, sometimes, it is true, looking at him as if she had never seen his like before, threw him all her friendliness and her innate capacity for sweetness.

There was competition almost from the first day of Nicola's arrival. Martha MacCree had written various old friends of her daughter's visit. One of them, a Mrs. van Blarcom, who had married more successfully, in a worldly sense, than any of the little group that had included Martha and Lydia, called the first week with her son, a young lieutenant in the United States Air Mail Service.

He formed the nucleus of a group that quickly grew. Yardsleys' became in no time a mecca for young people of the social caliber that moved in the set of Lieutenant van Blarcom, eldest son of the president of the Trades Bank of America.

And if Bernard was not quite one of them, either from social standing or from habits of life, these chic young people, coming from the luxurious homes of the large Middle West city, were

too well bred to let him know it. He was a great success on the dance floor, played an acceptable game of bridge, and performed first-rate jazz with long, plying, fragile fingers. He was soon discovered to be the creator of the stunning character dolls that Vanderhof's were featuring in all their window displays, and every girl of the gay and debonair set was after him for one.

If, at this discovery, Lydia held a breath a bit, she might have spared herself. Nicola was the most enthusiastic exponent of Bernard's dolls. She paraded them before all visitors, boomed their value, and proudly exploited Bernard as their creator.

She created a sensation one day, appearing at a luncheon with Lieutenant van Blarcom at the Country Club, carrying a doll that lacked only a few inches of her own height, and so precisely in her image, that amusement ran high.

Bernard had achieved his Nicola with amazing fidelity. The lovely blond hair that Nicola had never worn short, but in a great bunch of blond curls on top of her head as if screwed there by a mother on a hot day, he had matched by snipping off a bit of one of these very curls. The color of the doll's face was Nicola's own coloring. The

natty light-blue sports suit of silk sweater and flannel plaited skirt was Nicola. The perpetually bobbing young legs. It was Nicola to the life, all right.

It had been easy for Bernard to do Nicola to the life. Her loveliness was graven into his heart, so that he knew the trick of the turn of her head, coquettish yet half demure. Her fingers tapered in a way that was adorable to him. There was a little pool of shadow at her throat which he thought beautiful, and there was no mannerism of her lithe and sinuous body too casual to seem lovely to him.

In the true sense of the word, it *was* a lithe and sinuous body. Nicola had not been reared along white sun-baked seacoast for naught. The fluidity of water was in her movements. Her babyish body had slid into the purr of the Pacific almost before it could run.

The first day she dived off the springboard of the Country Club swimming pool, a storm of surprised applause rose from the side lines. Why, here was a water sprite! A past master of the "Australian," the "jack-knife," and countless more difficult and complex dives that were unknown to these inland parts. In the one-piece

bathing togs that fitted her body like a coating of gold leaf, she cut into the water as it parted in magic portières for the scarcely perceptible cleft of her body. Scarcely a ripple. Not a splash.

Small wonder that the Lieutenant was smitten. Or, for that matter, Don Sertz, a brilliant young lawyer and amateur golf champion, to say nothing of the string of runners-up in the wake of the lively Miss MacCree.

Sometimes in his new and secret anguish of the lover, Bernard wondered if he even numbered among the runners-up. So did Lydia, fearfully. And yet, where Bernard was concerned, Nicola was consistently her gentlest and most considerate self. Not alone with the gesture of diplomacy that was born of her innate coquetry, but with something quieter and kinder was she considerate of Bernard.

Nicola was thoroughly capable of borrowing an evening that she had promised to Peter, in order to pay it to Paul, at the same time managing to keep Peter as enslaved as ever. But there was something in her attitude to Bernard that sometimes made Lydia longingly and fiercely hopeful, and then again could dash her to despair.

Was Nicola sorry for Bernard? Was she constantly on the defensive for him? Ready to throw her spirited defense in behalf of those who doled out their hospitality to her? Or was Nicola coming awake to the lure of the slim young prince of a Bernard whom Tish had celebrated since his birth?

They were a beautiful pair together. Swift, blade-like young bodies. Lifted profiles. Lean youngsters. Eager. On the tennis courts, Bernard disported himself well enough.

He wore a glove on his racquet hand because his service stroke raised blisters; but then, so did the Lieutenant. The sun bothered him on the court, and even with his cap pulled down far enough to impede his stroke, caused his eyes to smart and become bloodshot. But of all this only Lydia and Tish were aware. A notoriously good dancer, the girls clamored for him, and that attested to a certain kind of popularity. It was about the third month of her visit, as spring came along, that Nicola decided he must really learn to swim.

It seemed to Lydia, that with the gesture of teaching Bernard to swim, Nicola was trying to answer either the spoken or the unspoken asper-

sions of the men who crowded in Bernard's home without ever quite seeming to make him one of them.

Were these aspersions spoken or unspoken? Lydia would have given much to know. These men who came to the house and were polite to Bernard, what was the film of restraint in their manner to him? What was the film of Lydia's fear for him?

There was no way to read into the Sphinx that was Bernard, she had long ago taught herself that, but his poise, both down at the business these days and in his social hours, could not have been all simulated.

To be sure, it was poise that was keyed at a high pitch. Nicola was the lovely answer to that. She was the lovely answer to the high tension that gripped all the youth who flocked about her.

Between the frequent comings and goings of the Lieutenant, Don Sertz, and the runners-up, the very air of the household was beginning to be surcharged with something competitive going on.

The young Lieutenant was frankly now, out and out, paying his homage. American Beauty roses arrived in hampers tied around in ten-inch ribbon and long enough to contain four-foot

stems. He had a way of conferring elaborate gifts so simply, that Lydia, in her rôle of chaperon, could not find conscientious excuse to damp his ardor. He had a small brooch made for Nicola in the form of a platinum biplane, set in what he called marcasite. In reality, they were small diamonds faultlessly matched. Nicola was frank in her delight. So was she in response to competitive, if less subtle, attentions of Don Sertz, who showered her with telephone calls, motor rides, sweets, Angora kittens, theater tickets, a ball-bearing, especially balanced tennis racquet, and, as crowning tribute, sent her over one day, decked in ribbons, the particular cleek, which in his opinion had clinched for him the amateur state golf championship.

How Nicola, with vivacious ambidexterity, kept the various plates in the air was a source of never-ceasing wonder to the gallery of admiring onlookers who watched the contest with unabating interest. Not even the most obscure in the long list of runners-up, neighbors like Bleeker or Rodney, ever had occasion to feel pique or slight at the hands of Nicola.

She reigned with a free high hand. She bestowed favors and kept the household in a gale of

excitement and amusement over her infallible ability to keep everybody appeased and unsuspecting.

Lydia admired, even while she feared. And hoped.

Bernard was learning to swim now, down at one of the smart South Side Boat Clubs to which the coming of Nicola had given them *entrée*, by guest card. Every Saturday afternoon, he and Nicola returned from there full of the recital of his progress.

Something warm and grateful was in Lydia's heart toward Nicola for this particular manifestation of her generosity of spirit toward Bernard. Yet somehow, even while she applauded, Lydia could never bring herself to accept their invitation to accompany them to the South Side Boat Club. It would have hurt her to see this effort of her son.

As that spring wore on into a hot, brilliant, and not too humid summer, the competition formed itself into one that included Bernard as a neck-and-neck aspirant.

Nicola was awake to Bernard, all right. The flush along her smooth skin as he entered a room, the high brilliance of an eye, attested! And then

—off again. On again. Time and time again, Lydia watched Nicola rob the Lieutenant of an evening to pay Don with it; snatch Bernard's coveted hours away from him in order to go off riding with the Lieutenant; or just as skillfully, with the litheness of a cat walking between porcelains, dart away from the Lieutenant to attend the Municipal Opera in Forest Park with Bernard.

One day, without Lydia knowing about it until it was over, the Lieutenant took Nicola up in a monoplane flight over the city. That seemed to excite Nicola more than anything that had happened to her. She dogged the Lieutenant to take her up again and again. Something new and heady and additionally exciting was in Nicola's excited eyes these days.

The Lieutenant's stock had taken a long leap forward. His flying helmet hung on her bedpost. They rowed together, danced together, flew together, tennised, golfed, swam. The van Blarcoms owned saddle horses, and at six o'clock of tender summer mornings, the Lieutenant would whiz down the quiet street in his cigar-shaped roadster, to take Nicola over to the park bridle-path, where a groom waited with their mounts.

Even Lydia realized by then the dangers of this

competition, but if faint heart overtook Bernard these days, he showed it by neither word nor act. With the fringe of her time, Nicola still made her weekly excursion with him to the Boat Club, so that by midsummer they were able to strike out for a full half-mile swim together.

The first coat of tan he had ever known came down like a film over Bernard's pale oblong cheeks and blistered the backs of his hands. There had been a time when Tish would have anointed them with creams, but this the Bernard of the new hardiness would have repelled. Instinctively, Tish did not attempt it, but her heart was sullen within her these days of the new tension in the household.

"Cain't make a sow's ear out of a silk purse. Peelin' off de skin of mah young prince lak he was made out of de same leather of all dis gang hanging around heah. Neber saw de like de way de Lawd made wimmin for to make fools of men ——"

These observations, however, were made chiefly to the sink over which the dark and corduroyed face of Tish hung during the workaday hours when Bernard and his mother were at the establishment and Nicola was only in and out of the

house sporadically, dipping in for a change of costume or a dash for her tennis racquet or flying-coat of leather, and always, to the none too subtle disgust of Tish, leaving a trail of garments, scent, petals, and excitement in her path.

One evening, with a stoppage of heart, Lydia could have sworn that she felt against Nicola's little breast, as she tiptoed into Lydia's room in her black-silk pajamas to kiss her goodnight, the pressure of a ring that must have dangled from a thin chain around the girl's neck.

Was Nicola secretly engaged to the Lieutenant?

Surely not, Lydia told herself over and over again during the long watches of that sultry night. The Lieutenant was all right, a fine fellow, but entirely without the magnetism necessary to hold a girl like Nicola. And Nicola was not worldly enough to sell herself. No. No. No. Why, Lydia knew it to be a fact, that by skillful maneuver to keep everybody happy, Nicola, past master at it, had contrived to attend the Edgerton Aquatic Club Annual Sports Day with Bernard and his mother, instead of abiding by her original plan to attend this picnic event with the Lieutenant.

Sly child, she had maneuvered it in a way that quite passed over the rather heavy head of the Lieutenant, giving him a paltry evening at the theater in return for the long, lazy hours of a day on the beach.

There was only one motive could have prompted the little hedonist to this strategy. After all, there were limits to one's sense of obligation to one's host. Nicola must have done this because she wanted to be with Bernard.

It was on this thought that the storm-tossed Lydia finally dropped off to sleep. It was on that thought that she awoke to the following day with a pleasant sense of its impending festivities. Week-ends, during the long, slack summer months, meant release from the torrid days at the establishment, when Lydia was obliged to reduce her working force by one half, and the city emptied itself of the majority of her customers.

Before the advent of Nicola, she and Bernard had indulged in the less pretentious pastimes of trolley rides out to Edgewater Highlands, the public park that adjoined the Aquatic Club, or little picnics that included Tish, to attend to the baskets, that they held in Forest Park or in lovely Shaw's Gardens.

Nicola had changed all that. Doors now swung open to Lydia and Bernard at which previously they had never even dreamed of knocking. Lydia, with no social instinct herself, was chiefly glad for Bernard. She loved to see him in the correct flannels that he wore so well, starting off for Country Club or summer dance in the company of the chic young people who came clamoring for Nicola.

This day, Lydia, who loved to be lavish and exceed her means if only for a brief while, and then scrimp in penance, had hired a large car. No trolley car for Nicola, to remind her that she might have been skimming out in the Lieutenant's roadster!

There were lunch hampers and Tish to attend to them, and all of Nicola's paraphernalia of bathing togs and dance clothes for the evening affair, and tennis racquets, and Bernard's change of shoes, and beach robes, and wraps, and at the very last moment, because there was an unoccupied seat in the car, nothing would do but Nicola must send Bernard dashing back upstairs for the doll image of herself, and while he was at it, shouting out after him, as he bounded one third

the flight at a time, bring down her Teddy-bear purse, who would be lonesome if left behind.

Nonsensical gayety such as this she was capable of by the hour. To watch her was as diverting as to listen. Her face had no repose. All flashes and pouts and laughter.

What a girl, thought Lydia on the long drive out. The man who won the volatile creature would be let in for torment of a kind, and yet there was a womanhood latent in Nicola that would assert itself once she settled down. Better Bernard should have her and suffer than suffer for want of her.

What a girl!

The day was as gay as a parasol. Whitish sky, almost too brisk a breeze, and the first barefoot children of the new summer out along the open roads. Nicola blew them kisses off the palms of her hands and bowed the doll solemnly. She was gay to absurdity. There was a song of the little brown boys of Hawaii—plong plong. Even Tish, who bore her deep and purely imaginary grudge, grunted from her place in the front seat beside the hired chauffeur.

If Lydia half feared that in the rush of young people at the club house Bernard would lose

Nicola, she might have spared herself this dread. Nicola had evidently, and even a little naughtily, determined to attach herself to Bernard for this occasion. She was quite firm; at least she was firm for Nicola.

Lydia knew that at some moment on the way out, beneath lap robes, perhaps, the signet ring on Bernard's left little finger had changed places and now gleamed on Nicola's third. It lifted the depressing sensation that the imprint of the ring had left against the bosom of Lydia.

The Lieutenant was there in a flying helmet, the silver wings of his plane visible on the great open meadow below the club veranda. Seitz was there, too, in plus fours, and countless of the runners-up, all clamoring for favor.

The plan was very simple. Tish had remained in the car with the baskets. Nicola and Bernard were to change into bathing suits and then return to the car with Lydia for an all-day loaf and picnic two miles down the beach, until time to return to the club house for evening festivities.

Nicola had planned this day. She knew a cove. There was a gleam in her eye as she shook her bright head to a low-voiced remark of the Lieutenant. Had they quarreled? Was this the secret

of this sudden heritage of this precious day into the hands of Bernard? Her gay dash or the car dispelled that suspicion.

No, sir. Nicola had willed to give this day to the seclusion of a picnic down the beach, with just the family. "My muffins tuffins darlingums family" as she put it.

"Muffins tuffins darlingums nuffin," had been Tish's retort to the sink, the first time she had heard it.

Well, just the same, whatever had been the last quirk of Nicola with the Lieutenant, he was left standing rather dourly alone on the club-house steps, as the car, filled with Nicola's patter, drove away.

The sun seemed to spread itself to make this coolish day a hard, white, glittering splendor. They found the cove, already known to Nicola, and so far removed from the sight of human habitation that there was a definite sense of isolation about it. The restless wavelets made a slapping sound against rocks. The wind was high enough to make a zipping cry as it turned the jagged edges of small crags.

The chauffeur and Tish planted a large red-and-white-striped umbrella in the sand and spread

rugs. Books and magazines were unearthed, the food baskets placed in sheltered places beneath the rocks, and a thermos bottle of lemonade stuck into the sand beneath the umbrella.

It was a day that seemed to pour its vitality and brightness into the flesh. Nicola was like a big cat. She could not have enough of stretching and lying flat on her lovely back with the light streaming along the ridge of her body.

It was one of the few times that Lydia had ever beheld her son in swimming trunks. His blade of a young body undulated with the ripple of muscles. If he was too slim, there was something packed and tight and right about the sparseness as his ribs strained at the stretched skin, his torso as concave as a Greek runner's.

How beautiful they were, stretched out there side by side, shamelessly and sensuously going drunk on sunlight. They were like a pair of figures on the friese of a beautiful alabaster vase, that stood in the van Blarcom drawing-room. Fleet, swift, soft youth. Presently they would bound away. . . .

When they did, it was to cleave long-limbed into the tumbling lake. Nicola as quick and sure as a sword into its scabbard, Bernard next, blanch-

ing and shivering for a moment, and then after her in the strokes she had taught him.

Lydia was not prepared for the sensation of beholding her son swim. Her limbs trembled. Splotches swam before her eyes. Tish's voice, garrulous and full of a dozen concerns, banged thickly against her ears. How daringly Bernard swam beside Nicola, right out to where the waves became hillocks. Except that his face was contorted with effort and his stroke perhaps a beat behind, there was little difference between the motion of the two bodies out on the bobbing waves.

The sun caught in Nicola's bright skewered hair, which she always wore uncovered, and presently it was streaming out behind her like seaweed. The sun lay on Bernard's black crop, too, and shone along his tanned hairless arms as he cleaved.

"Be yohself, honey-chile. Dat swimmin' ain't in yoh nachure—it's ag'in' it. . . ."

"Tish, be quiet! Can't you see Bernard has turned into a splendid swimmer?"

"Mah young prince'll bust his heart over dat little sea devil out dar what ain't fit to shine his shoes. . . ."

"Tish!"

"Cain't make a sow's ear out of a silk purse."

Silly old brown crocodile of a Tish. Lydia began to help her set out the picnic lunch on a red-check tablecloth, while the children swam. Silence closed them in as securely as a cove.

After the young ones had climbed out of the water and packed one another in sand graves and then soaked in more sun, they dined under the striped parasol off the checked tablecloth. Nut-bread sandwiches with cream-cheese hearts. Lydia was that kind of a cook, with a hand for only the fancy dishes that delighted the eye as well as the palate. Olives wrapped in bacon and stabbed with a toothpick. Cold white meat of chicken rolled and filled with caviar. Home-made candied prunes stuffed with apricot. Potato chips. Hard-boiled eggs with sardelle yolks. Tish's devil-food cake. Pineapple punch. Salted walnut meats. A tiny Hawthorne jar of candied ginger, Nicola's favorite.

How they ate! With what incredible gusto, Nicola nibbling off Bernard's sandwich and Bernard closing down on her fingers when she offered him a bite.

A place had been gouged into the sand for the

doll Nicola, but she persisted in toppling over on her side, and finally, for bad behavior, was banished in a swift toss by Nicola, within near reach of the waves, where she remained exiled for lack of backbone.

Nonsense. Nonsense. Dear nonsense that warmed Lydia. The breeze stiffened. The sun poured. It was an afternoon to relax on a beach.

It was an afternoon, declared Nicola, to sleep on a beach, and nothing would do but that they sleep on a beach. The chauffeur was fed and allowed a stroll to the village. The knives, forks, pasteboard spoons and plates, the leavings, the boxes, the paper napkins, the glasses, the cups, were cleared.

Conversation drifted. Nothing could distract Nicola from the idea of sleep on the beach. She yawned prodigiously. She spread a rug for Lydia and another for herself, and before she curled up into hers, made a little dugout of sand for Bernard.

Talk, talk and high laughter, between him and Nicola long after they were all stretched out in the sun. Finally, only the high, remote sound of a rook. Even Tish had curled up for a snooze

in the rear seat of the car. The silence seemed to sleep.

A tonic of a day, one not soon to be forgotten. Relaxed limbs lay along the sand, even those of the doll Nicola, so perilously down near the waves.

It seemed to Lydia, drowsy with the sweetest kind of fatigue, that the sun had sucked her in and then spewed her out, on a shout. It was the sort of awakening that lands one upright from a horizontal.

The rug that Nicola had tucked around Lydia with so much insistent ado that she sleep, had been jerked off with a rude hand—the rude hand of a high wind. A sudden fury of sand blew forward along the beach, like a woman's skirt. The striped umbrella bounced from its moorings, and Bernard sat upright in the little shelter Nicola had built for him of sand, and fumbled a moment to get his bearings.

"Nicola!"

Nicola's rug had been tossed aside, but the sand still held the light print of her body.

"What's up, Mother?"

"It's a blow. Where's Nicola? Throw that sweater over your shoulders, son. Gracious! what a change!"

The lake had the tumbled look and the hissing sound to it of a surf. Low clouds, the lead color of water and with shred-like edges, hung over the lake. Waves, the lead color of the sky, rose to small peaks and made hissing sounds as they went down.

"Nicola! Yoo-hoo, Nick! Where is she?"

"Here, Mother, you'd better slide into this slicker. It's a blow, all right. Nick! Yoo-hoo! . . ."

Suddenly as they scurried into wraps, a thought struck Lydia. Sly Nicola. It seemed clear now to her rested brain. Had she tucked them all soundly to sleep in order to keep a tryst with the Lieutenant? Nicola's way of having her cake and eating it, too. It seemed to Lydia that back there in her doze she remembered the soft sounds of laughter and of Nicola moving about. Was Nicola at her old trick of keeping everybody happy? How more than probable! Oh dear! Poor Bernard! How more than probable that down there behind the cove at this moment she was keeping rendezvous with the Lieutenant, or perhaps had even gone with him for a hop in the plane. Surely though, the Lieutenant would not dare that with her in this roguish weather! Scan-

ning an anxious eye across the tumbling heavens, Lydia's gaze caught on an object out beneath the horizon. Oh! Oh! Oh! Foolish, dare-devil little water rat! Just like her to have gone for a swim. There she bobbed, far too remote from shore.

"Why, Bernard, Nick's out there swimming! She oughtn't to be way out there with this blow coming up. Yoo-hoo, Ni-ick!"

"Well, I'll be darned!" So it was Nick bobbing along out there! Why, one didn't swim that far out—no telling how far out that might be!

Simultaneously, standing there beside Bernard on the wind-swept beach, that same thought was born on Lydia. One only swam out that far on a lake like that if one was *carried* out!

"Mother—something's not right—out there!"

"No," said Lydia, quite softly, and laid her hand against her mouth.

A flurry of sand flew between them and the horizon and the lake seemed to lurch away from them.

"Nick!" screamed Lydia, and ran down toward the receding water.

"Nick!" shouted Bernard, and made a mega-

phone of his hands. The wind whistled over his light voice.

"My Gawd Almighty!" cried Tish, who had tumbled out of her nap on the rear seat of the car by now. "Who dat out dar—little Miss Nick? My Gawd Almighty—God have mercy on my soul!"

"Nick!" shouted Lydia, forming her hands like Bernard's and bending into the whirling sound the wind made, "Nick! Nick! Turn back! Can't you—turn—back——"

Nicola's voice came back at them faintly, "Yoo-hoo!"

"Dat chile's cotched out thar, Miss Lydia. Oh, my Gawd Almighty—dat's what comes of playing wid de will of de Lawd."

"Nick!" screamed Bernard. "Swim in——"

"Yoo-hoo!" came Nicola's voice, fainter this time, and then unmistakably the head bobbed out farther.

Nicola was beyond her depth, beyond her strength. The waves were forcing her out. Nick was being carried out. There was no mistaking that. On a roughening lake that was known to be squallish upon occasion. Martha, you put your girl in my trust. . . .

"Lawd Almighty," cried Tish and fell to the posture of supplication that came natural to her, and dug her knees into the sand and dry-washed her hands.

"Tote dat chile innard steada outa. Oh, Lawd, tote dat chile innard."

Standing there, sand curling in spirals around, it might have been an hour, it might have been an instant, that Lydia regarded her son. She only knew that her feet were rooted in immobility and her voice was rooted in silence.

"Well, well, well, Mother," cried Bernard and began to run toward her with swinging, helpless gestures of his long smooth arms and then to back away from her. "Well, Mother. . . ."

The terror in his voice smote her, cracked her heart with pity, and it felt to her for an instant that she must be standing here unconscious. "Well, Mother. . . ."

Wellwellwellwellwellwellwellwell

"Well, Mother?"

Wellwellwellwellwellwellwellwell

"Bernard-boy," screamed Tish, rising out of her suppliant crouch as if a specter of fear, undreamed even by her fertile imagination, had poked lean fingers through her—"Bernard-boy,"

screamed Tish, rushing to throw her arms about his knees. "Don't you go out dar in dat water. God made you too high-toned for dis man-huntin' world. You stay here by Tish, Barney-boy. Only Tish and Barney know how cold and black dat water out dar is. She don't. Miss Nicola will git back all right, Barney-boy. Tain't nothing to her to swim out thar, 'cause she ain't got no scare in her. Tain't nothing brave to do what you ain't scared of. Only Tish and Barney knows dat water thar—hates dat water thar——"

"Dare I, Mother?" shouted Bernard. "Dare I, Mother?" And with one jerk, while Lydia stood rooted to her silence, threw Tish over on her side, cleared her, and on his words, struck out, cleaving through the water in the overhand stroke that only a few hours before, or was it years, had so delighted Lydia.

"Oh my God! Jesu', lover of my soul! Jesu'! Jesu'! Jesu'! Gawmighty—Jesu'!"

Was distance tricking Lydia? Was there some unsuspected and cruel law of physics leaning evilly into this moment to make it impossible for Bernard, by swimming steadily toward, to lessen the distance between himself and that bobbing head out there?

"Jesu' lover of my soul—help him Jesu'! Mah boy's scared till his marrow's froze. I know him so well, Jesu'! Mah young prince is scared and needs his Tish to hold him in her arms. Hold him for me, Jesu'! Hold my boy, Jesu', in yoh arms! Hold him—hold him ——!"

What would it have availed to call out, even if Lydia's tongue had not become a rooted thing. Tish, pray. Tish, pray. The wind made a coughing noise that said that. Lydia's tongue would not move.

Bernard, son. Bernard, son. Tish, pray. There you go! Push with your stroke. Up. Down. Tish, pray. Only now the wind and the praying was all one. Everything, gale, water, Tish, all one.

"He's got her! Gawalmighty!—Thanks—Jesu'. He's got her. Hold 'em both in your arms, Jesu', and get mah boy back to me. He hates the water, Lawd. It suffocates him. He's comin'. He's got her. Jesu'! Gwamighty, let me burn de soles off my feet and pull down de flesh off my bones to you for dis. He's got her. He's a comin'. Jesu', lover of my soul, hold mah boy in yoh arms."

How quickly they rode inward. No more

quickly, though, than the thaw began to run through Lydia's limbs. What made one keep thinking of the straight backs of women? What? Why, they were the proud backs of the proud mothers of brave men. One thought of straight backs because one's own back was so straight. Here they were coming. Quick, Tish, blankets! He's so pale. Bernard—quick, son! Give me your hand. Quick! Blankets for Nick. Quick, Tish!—brandy ——!

He stumbled a little as he climbed up out of the water, as if he had come from under, instead of across waves, and dropped his burden, with the blonde hair flowing back from her in a fan, on the sand before his mother, and his smile, just before he dropped into a heap, was as if his face were in two pieces, cleft into a lower and upper half by the frightfully pulled lips.

"Barney-boy! O my Jesu'! Da—da—da—ain't Miss Nick he done brought back. Dat's de doll dat was bobbin' out dar. Dat's de doll. Dat's de doll," blubbered Tish, her control all gone and her voice full of craziness. "Dat's de doll, dat's de doll," and began pinching at Bernard's blue legs and waving her long slender arms like semaphores. Crazy semaphores.

The doll Bernard had brought in lay now on the beach like a bit of seaweed, sprawling in more directions than a star has points, the hair wet gold. . . .

"Bernard," cried Lydia, softly, and dropped to her knees and tried to take his head, that rolled a little loosely, away from Tish. She knew. That look on his face, as he rose out of the sea—that look, half satirical, half ecstatic, and filled with pain, had been the look of a face in the act of feeling its heart in the act of leaving its moorings. To have looked upon that face, as it made shore smiling, was to know what it means to have the heart strain itself to death. To have looked upon that face in the debonair act of trying to smile the smile that cut it in two, was to know pretty nearly all the pain and all the joy there was to know.

Lydia had looked upon such a face.

Bernard.

. . "Barney-chile, don't you heah? What you lay-in' thar dataway for?"

Around the crag, quite suddenly, there burst the high-keyed apparition of Nicola, and in her tow the young Lieutenant. Spray was in her hair and along his mustache.

"We heard you shouting for me down along the beach. Didn't you hear me answer you, muffins-tuffins-darlingums family? The Lieutenant and I," she said, with the adorable look of guilt and irrepressible coquetry that made her madden and delight, "had a date for a walk while you-all sleepies slept. Oh, who's been drowning my imsy-bimsy baby-doll called Me?"

Suddenly the little group seemed to dawn upon her. She ran into its center quickly, her bare feet making the sand fly.

"What? Bernard? Why—what?"

Something had flashed to Tish as the head in her arms rolled a little loosely to the touch of Nicola. Immemorial grief for the immemorial dead was puckered terribly into the brown of her face.

"Bernard!"

"Don't you touch mah boy. Don't you touch mah honey-chile. Don't you touch mah young prince."

"BERNARD!"

"You! Stan' off! And dat piece of flyin' Lieutenant thar! And you, his mother, who let him bust his heart. What do you all know about bein' brave when you've never been afraid enough? My Barney-boy, wasn't for no man-

huntin' world lak yours. He knowed de Lawd was gentle, and if you'd all let him alone, he would have been gentle lak Him. Mah young prince was too gentle to go out dar for to bring in a piece of 'onry woman-flesh. And de Lawd turned her into sawdust. Jesu', open up yoh arms. O Jesu', step down out de fiery chariot and open up yoh arms. 'Tish is a-bringin' a young prince into de arms of de Lawd."

The Hossie-Frossie

THE Hossefrosses populated their city well. Every family of them traced a relationship back to one Hesse Hossefrosse who had first set foot in St. Louis as body-servant to one of the earliest arrivals in America of the Schwimmer family of brewery fame.

There were seven Hossefrosses listed in the telephone directory, none of them more remotely related than second or third cousinship.

Hossefrosse Charles, G. r. 3058½ S. Grand Ave.
Hossefrosse Frank, r. 3486 a Hickory St.
Hossefrosse Frank, whl. poul. & pro. 486 S. Third St.
Hossefrosse Hesse, sadlery 8686 Gratiot Street
Hossefrosse Joseph, locksmith 346 Leffingwell Av.
Hossefrosse Leffert 5681 S. Seventh St.
Hossefrosse Oscar, Jr., surg. inst's.. 2367 Arsenal St.
Hossefrosse Rudolph, bootmaker . . 5708 S. Broadway

A Hossefrosse might not so much as encounter a Hossefrosse year in and year out, but Joseph Hossefrosse, locksmith, for instance, who had clapped eyes only once on Rudolph Hossefrosse,

and that once when they had been alphabetically thrown together while paying their water taxes at City Hall, knew exactly the degree of their cousinship, which in this instance was third.

Ella Hossefrosse (Mrs. Leffert) sometimes bought her poultry retail from the wholesale Frank Hossefrosse on the strength of the cousinship, but there was practically no intercourse between the families.

With the exception that on one occasion a Hossefrosse had married a Hossefrosse. Kate Hossefrosse, daughter of the sadlery Hossefrosse, whose great-grandfather had come over with a Schwimmer of Schwimmer's Pale Brew fame, had married Rudolph Hossefrosse, bootmaker and son of three generations of bootmaking Hossefrosses.

It had all been highly regular and within the pale of the Choteau Avenue Lutheran Church. Kate and Rudolph were no less than third cousins.

Kate, in those days when a faint humor still hovered in crinkles along her eyelids, had railed good-humoredly at the fate which kept her, even to the outward manifestation of name, a Hossefrosse.

Hossefrosse. Hossefrosse. Later, it came to have a solemn lumbering sound to Kate. Writ-

ten, the word looked to her like some great mammalian creature with a slow lope to it. A terrific gawk of a prehistoric horse, with slow heavy legs that were hard to raise and which dredged up mud.

When Kate's child was no more than six she once, with a fine disregard for prevalent theories of child psychology, manufactured out of this conceit, the story of the Hossie-Frossie—her unmodern device for frightening the little girl into obedience.

If you don't mind mamma, like a good girl, the Hossie-Frossie'll get you. M-m-m, great big gray ugly Hossie-Frossie, twice as big as this house, with a hook on his tail for dragging little girls around and around in a circle. 'Round and 'round in a circle with their noses rubbing the ground all their lifetime, till they get old and die, with their noses rubbed off from being dragged around and around by the tiresome old Hossie-Frossie.

At this, Paula's eyes would grow very round with a sort of uncomprehending fear.

Hossie-Frossie—that's almost my name, Mother. Yes, that was almost Paula's name.

There was a set of neighborhood chimes on the old St. Mark's Church which used to seem to have

to Kate, as they tilted out a clatter every hour over the neighborhood where the establishment of the Rudolph Hossefrosses had stood for well over half a century, a little sing-song all their own.

Hos-sie Fros-sie. Hossiefrossie. Hos-sie Fros-sie. Hossiefrossie. The rhythm of it was unmistakable. To Kate at least. Tra la la la. Hos-sie Fros-sie. La. La. La. La.

Rudolph, who never smiled, used to hammer away, on those semi-occasions when an order for a hand-made boot drifted into the store, with his mouth full of tacks, to what Kate suspected to be the rhythm: Hos-sie-fros-sie. Hos. Hos. Hossefrosse.

That was nonsense, of course. Rudolph probably knew less of rhythm than any man who ever lived. Kate would have been sure of that, had such a word as rhythm ever popped into her head.

And yet, three generations of Hossefrosses, grandfather and grandmother, then father and mother, and finally Rudolph and Kate, had had their beings as good husbands, wives; good eaters, sleepers; good shopkeepers, citizens, and conformers to an impeccable rhythm of routine in that tall lean house with the shoe-store on the ground

floor and the living apartment rambling two and a half tall stories above.

Three generations of men had minded shop and morals on that strip of 40x100 lot. Three generations of women had minded both equally well, and kept immaculate house in the high-ceilinged narrow rooms, borne their children in the walnut bed of feathers, scrubbed little sags into the kitchen and side-porch floors, and kept white-washed the bricks that bisected the narrow side yard.

Kate, in those years before the crinkles of humor had flickered out along her eyelids, used to say that she knew every brick of that walk by heart. There was one down toward the middle that every spring sprouted a most insistent moss in its crack. You had to salt and salt it out. Rudolph hated a weedy walk. After a while, Kate came to hate a weedy walk.

She could ward off the impending moss with a squirt of lye or salt. Before she was nine, Paula, who was in the image of Kate, was already invaluable at the chores which made up the rhythm. She was a spick-and-span little girl with bright china-blue eyes and bound yellow plaits encircling

her head, precisely as Kate's had been bound at that age.

The mills of the Hossefrosse gods ground slowly, the family managing to keep chinks closed to the invasion of the "high-falutin' idea"; the new fashion; the "shiftlessness" of modern ways.

A penny saved was a penny earned.

Of course, some change had forced in since the days when the boot-making Rudolph had wooed and won the bright-haired daughter of a saddle-making Hossefrosse.

To begin with, not only the boot-making and the saddle-making industries had changed, but the town had changed. The old South Side—the "solid south"—had disintegrated. The West End, becoming fashionable, had lured away many of the young generation from that section of their forefathers which had been known as "Little Berlin."

Many of the old residences still stood intact. Lafayette and Park Avenue and parts of the Tower Grove section maintained fairly brave fronts, there were still business men in Carondal-et, and in extreme southern sections of town, whose grandfathers had been born on the sites where the businesses still stood, but since the mar-

riage of Rudolph and Kate, a World War had cleft the old days from the new.

It took the stability of a Hossefrosse to withstand these slashing inroads of new times. Rudolph might be said to have withstood them like the great flesh-wall of an elephant quivers to an insect bite, is pestered, but not moved.

The house on South Broadway, with its narrow, high-shouldered look and the side yard that would not grow grass because the dirt was tired, remained practically immune, so far as its inner life was concerned, to the quick tides of change that washed around it.

It is true that the fine art of boot-making as practiced pridefully by the generations of Hossefrosses who had cobbled away on the old bench of glossy patine that was now crowded in the back of the shop, had now gone by the board, as the saying is.

The result was an out-and-out retail shoe store, with packing cases that had been stood on ends along the walls and transformed into shelves, and two bright yellow benches with brass tacks and perforated trimmings forming an aisle that was covered with a rubber strip and dotted with small foot-rests for the customers.

A far cry from the old workaday shop where senior Hossefrosses had cobbled by hand vici kid boots for the husky proletariat of the South Side. This was an aspect of it that Kate most hated, particularly as Paula began to grow up. The character of the business had changed. With the general evolution of footgear for women, the gentry trade had slipped away to the larger downtown emporiums of wider variety of stock.

The Hossefrosses now did a retail business—a thriving one, it is true, but the fitting of a shoe was no longer a prideful matter of sliding a hand-made high shoe of vici kid on to the genteel foot of a local *hausfrau*.

The house of Hossefrosse now dealt in the fancy kids and shiny satins, too bright tans and blüchers, designed to meet the tastes of the servant girls, the chauffeurs, and street-car conductors of the post-war South Side.

Thursday was one of the evenings that Kate helped Rudolph in the store. Afterward, when they climbed to their old-fashioned rooms above, Kate's back ached from the strain of coaxing large cheaply made fancy slippers onto Polish, Finnish, and German girls, whose feet, due to vanity, ill-fitting high heels, and the hours they were

obliged to spend on them, were overgrown and bulging.

If Rudolph regretted or resented this deterioration from his rôle of skilled boot-maker to retail merchant, he said precious little about it. The business was prospering well enough. One took things as they came.

Yes, you did that, if you were a Hossefrosse. Dear knows, Kate was an example of that congenital ability on the part of a Hossefrosse to fit into the pattern. Pretty Kate. There had been a moment in her prettiness when the gently moving history of the saddle-making and the boot-making Hossefrosses had seemed to tremble in the balance.

It was only natural. Any girl's, much less a pretty one's, head can be turned. Kate's had been, but it was turned promptly about again into its place. Square on her Hossefrosse shoulders.

She had sung in the Choteau Avenue Church choir and during the period that young Rudolph, who had a square shaved head and small eyes, was wooing her, the choir master had received a call to go from the South Side to the First Lutheran Church of Kansas City, and had offered to take Kate along, as a salaried member of his new choir.

For a day or two after that Kate's eyes had looked appealingly moist, particularly to the choir master, from the secret tears of her desire to go, and Rudolph had been told, when he called that week, that "Katey was not feeling so well." But later, at her father's dictation, Kate had written out, in her round immature chirography, a note which she transcribed slightly out of its dialect. It was a polite, if not particularly regretful refusal of the choir master's offer.

Yes, being a Hossefrosse, one took things as they came. Kate took Rudolph and the after years of fitting their lives into the mold of the house on South Broadway, with never so much as a backward glance.

After all, a backward glance at what? The saddle-making Hossefrosses had lived, procreated, sat in their *bierstuben*, paid their pew dues, accumulated their nest eggs, sent their children through seventh-grade public school; inculcated thrift, lived thrift, exemplified thrift, even as the boot-making Hossefrosses, and for that matter the Produce, the Locksmith and the Butcher, the Baker, the Candlestick-maker, Hossefrosses. No one of them had ever seen anything about him except the cardinal virtues that had their incep-

tion back in an idea that conservation was consummation.

Kate, whose voice had been pretty chiefly because it was a young voice, had let it peter out as her waist line began to go. There was a square piano in the upper front room, but as long as Father Hossefrosse, the boot-making father of Rudolph, had lived, it was never opened, and Kate came into the household the last six years of his life. After that, Mother Hossefrosse had sickened and died in those same rooms, and by that time Paula was already a tripper and a climber, and somehow there just was not ever the propitious moment for song.

No, it could scarcely be said that conformity was a trick for Kate. Old lady Hossefrosse lived to welcome into her home a daughter-in-law who promptly learned to swing the very tassels on the mantelpiece drape of plush-and-chenille, at precisely the angle to which they had been accustomed for two generations of Hossefrosses. Kate took over the whitewashing of the bricks, the helping in the store, the baking of the sour-rye bread, the making of her husband's nightshirts, the rendering of her own lard, the laying of her

own fires, with never a jog in the machinery of daily life,

Not that there was anything remarkable in that. There was no other way for a Hossefrosse woman to be.

America was a land of opportunity. A land to which you gave the allegiance of good citizenship in return for its manifold benefits. But taking on the fidelities of citizenship to America was another matter from taking on its profligate ways.

Let the American live from hand to mouth. That was his concern. Triflers with life. Why, there were salaried men living on the South Side; men, mind you, without so much as a business to their names, wastrels, with not a penny ahead, yet who always showed the grin of ten-cent cigar points above their waistcoat pockets and whose wives kept "help"; whose children attended private schools and who themselves drove small sedans, when they owned not so much as a family lot in the cemetery.

Salaried men, mind you, salesmen, some of them insurance agents dependent on commissions, who bought their family coupés and their living-room "sets" on installments and whose children

grew up without proper regard for the value of money.

Well, the Hossefrosses, who could buy and sell this type of South Sider over again, had no family sedan. Would not have had one at any price. Constant expense. Dangerous. Superfluous. Kate came to agree with Rudolph on that. Even if you could afford one, they certainly were a drain, what with the upkeep and all.

Lax, pellmell, improvident, ill-organized, this world of Americans that was tincturing more and more the Solid South of the city. Rudolph, magnificently insulated from it all, turned a stolid back and went his Hossefrosse way. So did Kate go his way, except for the vicarious influence of the public schools and the sidewalk life as it touched her child.

"No monkey business ways out of you," thundered Rudolph, on those beginning occasions when the world did begin to succeed in invading the tight sanctity of that gray brick homestead, and Paula perhaps begged for sateen bloomers like the small girls of the neighborhood were wearing to school, or for the tid-bit price of a visit to a near-by motion-picture theater.

There was not much "monkey business" of any

sort in the carefully routined Hossefrosse household.

Of good food there was abundance; a form of indulgence that was characteristic. At forty-five, Rudolph bulged of well-being. His scrubbed pink skin shone; transparent and pink and polished were his bright ears. His neck, as it thickened and rolled down a bit over his decent white collar, was the same scrubbed pink.

Kate had not escaped the penalty of her full larders. Her jonquil, *fräulein* prettiness had overflowed its banks, so to speak. At forty she was any *hausfrau* who mixed a wickedly alluring batch of cinnamon rolls and whose pink cheeks asseverated to her ability to nibble as she cooked.

Where recreations and diversions were comparatively few, eating became a sort of righteous indulgence. Rudolph was entitled, after the long confining hours in the store, to tuck in his napkin with a will. Three times a day the Hossefrosses sat down to reap the gastronomic delights of Kate's skill at the large coal range in her large kitchen. Nourishing strong foods, perhaps even coarse, but under Kate's dash of paprika, bit of browned onion and flutter of bay leaves, a pot roast ran the most delicate juices and beneath

the swirl of her powerful wooden spoon a cheese cake could be born a puff.

The Hossefrosses lived well. On rainy days of double-session at school, Paula's lunch box was sure to yield over and above the less stable delights of the other children. Kate's sour-rye bread sandwiches of half an inch of cream cheese sprinkled with finely minced *Schnittlauch* (the shredded tops of spring onions) made pretty pale affairs of the slabs of ham on store bread the American children brought. Paula used to share the great cold apple dumplings that Kate always crammed into one end of the lunch basket with them, too. The boys and girls fought for that sharing of apple dumpling.

There came a time, however, along about the period that Paula began asking for motion-picture money, when she crept off by herself to eat her bulky luncheon. A new and cruel awareness was upon her.

It might be said that when Paula was about thirteen, this awareness, rising off the heart of her daughter, began to creep like a fog into Kate. Suddenly it came, and yet there was in this secret stream of consciousness which seemed flowing through her in torment now, something of a re-

crudescence; something that should have died way back with the frustration of the choir position in Kansas City apparently had not died, but only gone off into a coma as long as the years. The thing that resuscitated, was lifting itself within her now, was akin to the brief yearnings back there, when Rudolph had been wooing her and the choir master had come with his opportunity. Only back there in her slim girlhood there had been only the briefest, if tormented, desire to seek new fields.

That torment, in choosing to return to her after its brief flash fifteen or sixteen years before, had come to her now in its component parts. A restless and detailed awareness of the "Hossie-Frossie" as she had used to describe it in baby lingo to Paula, which was about to drag her daughter around on its life-round treadmill, had Kate in its clutch.

Paula was just seventeen. An adorable seventeen in Kate's eyes, with crinkles of humor still along her eyelids. You could never seem to have done discovering new little cornices and corners to Paula's prettiness. Her chin was cleft, as if to prove definitely that it could not be marred, but on the contrary, became just that much more pro-

vocative. There was a small golden mole on the highest peak of her cheekbone that was just like the one Kate hid on the curve of her breast. Dear girl, with never much finery to deck it, Paula's young body, slimmer than Kate's had ever been, was pliant and full of the impulse for speed. Kate, beholding her young offspring turn eager face out toward the play and nonsense world which no Hossefrosse ever really entered, felt the stricture of torment at her heart.

Paula, much more than her mother before her, was laying back her young ears, so to speak, to the whinny of the youth which passed her in the streets, sat beside her in Bible class, lured her to the neighborhood theaters and beckoned her out to play.

And Kate, whose own rebellion sixteen years before had been only seven days long, began to dread.

There seemed something so incontestibly fore-ordained about the destiny of a Hossefrosse. There was a gray procession of the women and a gray procession of the men. They were hay-foot, straw-foot, sort of people.

In some of the families which had grown up about Kate, even among the staid South Siders

of rigid stabilities, the occasional cataclysm, irregularity or capricious thing had occurred.

One of the Deifenbach girls, for instance, had eloped with an artist, and was said to be living in Greenwich Village in New York.

Fred Whatmough, whose father had conducted one of the largest meat stalls in Union Market for over thirty years, fired with his reading of Stanley and Livingstone, had joined a motion-picture expedition and gone in quest of wild-game pictures in Central Africa.

Then there was the case of Lina Rinchoff, who had "gone away," as the discreet-mouthed South Siders put it, with her music-teacher, whose wronged wife and three children still resided on Shaw Place. Lina had since become quite a successful vaudeville actress and sang, "Great Grand-Opera Moments," to accompaniments arranged and played by her—er—lover.

From time to time there had been photographs in the Sunday rotogravure sections of Lina with "him" at the piano.

Kate had scarcely known her, although they had attended the same South Side grammar school. There had been little if anything in those days to indicate what power to spring must even then

have lain crouched behind the rather solid prettiness of Lina.

What courage. What courage. Kate knew the Rinchoff family. The old man had amassed a fortune in sausage casings, but the family still lived in a rented, two-family house on Gratiot Street and Mrs. Rinchoff could still be seen of any Saturday morning on her back porch, squeezing pot cheese through a bag for Sunday morning's batch of cheese cake. What courage!

The way Kate, now that Paula was in her teens, found herself looking at it was, even if that brilliant smile of Lina's in the rotogravures was only looped over misery, it was a better kind of misery than the incalculably dull wretchedness of being a Hossefrosse or a Rinchoff.

That meant servitude to the relentless routines of respectability, repetition, and with the sole exception of indulgence of palate, frugality. That meant the relentless routine of carrying forward the rigid tenets of stability, morality, practicability.

Practicability, indeed! A Hossefrosse was taught to respect money with an austerity and reverence for its place in the scheme of life. You were meticulous to the penny about money. A

penny saved was a penny gained. A Hossefrosse saved for that rainy day.

Once Kate had cut out a newspaper saying, "The rainy day comes to those who wait for it." That, of course, she knew was grossly untrue. But somehow—if one could only be a little gay about money. Money bought nonsenses. It seemed to Kate that nonsenses, bracelets, candies in silver wrappers, fancy dogs with ribbon bows, lingerie, nice table crystal, cigar-shaped roadsters, frail French sitting-room furniture, wrist watches, and bits of court plaster pasted on pretty cheek bones, could make life very gay.

But of course, rightly enough, too, the ideal of a Hossefrosse, over and above those things, was to be in a position where you need never borrow of your neighbor and you expected the same of him. A Hossefrosse never lent; but on the other hand it must be said for a Hossefrosse, that he never borrowed. Undeniably, that was fair enough.

Lina, Kate remembered, had always been careless about the tiny money matters of school life. A penny meant nothing to her. If it rolled beneath a desk, she would scarcely stoop for it. She borrowed freely. Slate sponges, lollipops, pencils. But she gave when she had it, even more freely.

In the eyes of a Rinchoff that was as lax, both the giving and the receiving, as it was in the eyes of a Hossefrosse.

What a courage, what a courage Lina had displayed! Only a Hossefrosse, born and bred as a Rinchoff was born and bred, could adequately realize that.

So by the time Paula was sixteen and lovely and her young ears seemed to be laid back to the whinnying of youth to youth, strange, alien, and thoroughly terrifying thoughts were beginning to troop through the orderly brain of her mother.

Even if it should turn out to be a smile looped over misery, Kate wanted Paula in the end to have to conceal a less lowly unhappiness than the drab numbness of being a Hossefrosse.

What if Paula, who was a little snowdrop, should choose to—to go the wrong way of Lina. The bad way of Lina. Why, even as that thought popped for the first time into the appalled brain of Kate, she shooed it out with a literal stamp of her foot as she would a mouse nibbling on her immaculate pantry shelves.

Paula a bad girl? Not the kind of bad girl she had used to frighten out of childish insubordinations with the story of the Hossie-Frossie. Bad

in the sense of—sin! No, no, Paula would be better dead than that. That was what they all said of Lina. Better dead. That was what you said of one who had sinned—that way.

And so in the beginning, when Paula started to come to her all agog in her lovely eager way for the denied pleasures she was only just growing up to, Kate was firm as her husband could have been under the pressure.

The idea! Movies on Thursday after school! What was the world coming to? There were plenty of movies to be done at home, helping, if she had so much free time on her hands. Movies on a week day! Who ever heard of such a thing? Such a thriftless American idea! In Kate's day, a girl came home after school and helped her mother or did her lessons. Movies! Fine come-off! Huh, who ever heard the like?

But, Mother, the girls are going to see Rod La Rocque this afternoon. It's only fifteen cents if you cut the coupon out of the *Post Dispatch*.

All the girls are going straight to the bad with their stage-struck ways and hand-to-mouth habits.

Mamma, you don't mean that. Just a movie.

No, Kate did not mean that either. She wanted

to mean it. She aped the phrases that came so solidly from her husband's lips, but in her heart the shocking forbidden emotion was rolling about, refuting the words on her lips.

Ask Father to let me go, Mother. It's only fifteen cents.

"Only fifteen cents." Not much for girls whose fathers don't pay their bills. The sooner you learn the value of fifteen cents, the better.

Mother, you don't mean that.

No, Kate did not mean that, either. The mere thought of Paula learning the Hossefrosse value of fifteen cents was terrible to her. But like pebbles, the words that were in reality Rudolph's, kept clattering from her lips. "What-were-folks-coming-to? Wastrel. Hand-to-mouth-ways. Come to a bad end. Stage-struck."

It was not easy to maneuver with Rudolph, who was averse to motion pictures, except once in a while, if Kate went along with her daughter. Usually he came down hard on the suggestion of a *matinée* at the local stock company which revived old successes and was popular on the South Side.

It hurt Kate, on a Thursday afternoon, for instance, during the rush when the local servant

girls, on their "day off," were in buying shoes, to see Paula's bright head bent over the task of trying to force a thick foot into a cheap satin slipper. Paula should have been at gay places, like a *matinée*, or a tea. There was something revolting in the spectacle of a heavy heel cupped in Paula's hand, as she coaxed and prodded an unyielding slipper.

Kate in her time had coaxed many a hundred of those bulging feet into reluctant shoes. Every Thursday and Saturday evening for eighteen years, she had helped Rudolph in the store. But now, with Paula suddenly turned aware, so to speak, in the fretful chafing way of frustrated girlhood, not so much a rebellion, as a great fear, was opening up in the secret places of Kate's heart.

Already, on one or two occasions, Rudolph had mentioned as desirable, the Scheidig boy, Otto, who had come from Mannheim, Germany, three years before, to make his home with his uncle Scheidig, an old bachelor watchmaker who was quite a character on the South Side. Otto had not taken to watchmaking, but as foreman in a heel-and-counter factory was working his way toward a white-collar job.

Otto had wide-apart square teeth, a round, not ill-humored face, and a shaved blond head. He was rapidly becoming more and more Americanized in his speech and dress, and was known as a steady fellow.

The eye of Rudolph had swung solemnly upon him for the first time when Paula was sixteen and Otto had walked by the house one July Sunday afternoon with his uncle, as the Hossefrosses were sitting in the side yard for a breath of air.

There was no mistaking it. Otto had sidled up to Paula. It was the first time Kate had seen Paula boy-conscious. She giggled and batted her eyes and rolled them. Somehow Kate had been ashamed for her. Or perhaps only a little horrified. Or even more probably, it might have been the opening up, in the secret places of her heart, of her fear for her daughter.

Kate knew the workings of Rudolph's mind so well. Of late in particular, because a sciatic nerve was combining with overweight to render him less agile on his feet, he had alluded frequently to a hypothetical son-in-law, now that Paula was coming along. The business, while not exactly growing in scope, was growing in its demands.

Boot-making, in the good old sense of its prac-

tice by Rudolph's grandfather and father before him, was one thing, but the retail shoe-business was another. Competition was keen. The trade had to be catered to. Since hired help, such as servant girls, did their shopping, for the most part, after the last supper cup was hung on its hook, Rudolph was in favor of keeping the store open six evenings a week. That meant more help.

Rudolph was coveting a son-in-law.

Kate knew. Rudolph, in fact, so much as out and out said so. A steady fellow who could come into the family and take hold. No man, not even Rudolph, could expect to live forever. Kate was a good hefty woman, but for that matter, no longer what she used to be on her feet. Why, Rudolph could remember when Kate, on hands and knees, could scrub the whole of the woodshed floor before she served a six-o'clock breakfast, piping hot, of country sausages, fried potatoes, baking-powder biscuits, fried mush. Of course, there was no longer the woodshed, now that the bit of land back there had been sold to a gasoline station. Still, it is more than possible that even if there had been, Kate would no longer have been the woman she was. Sometimes, kneeling before a customer in the store, it was all she

could do to get to her feet again. Rheumatic. Yes, Rudolph coveted a son-in-law, a steady con-formative fellow, worthy the opportunity of walking into the chance of a lifetime and carrying on the tradition.

Otto was such a fellow. And Kate knew in her heart that it was a sin against God, against Rudolph, against her child, to harbor those secret places of rebellion within her. Rudolph, who was a hard, dull man, had at least never made her feel, by word or act, his disappointment that there had been no male issue of his marriage. It must, however, have rankled in him all these years. Once, sensing this bitterly, Kate had visited an obstetrician five or six years after the birth of Paula. Apparently there was no anatomical reason, but it was not to be that the house of Rudolph Hossefrosse be blessed with a son. And now, here in Otto was the opportunity for vicarious fulfillment. Kate bit down into her tongue with perplexity at the plight of her emotions.

Otto was amenable timber. Every Sunday he came walking home from church with Rudolph and Paula for midday dinner, and was visiting now, two and three evenings a week besides. And why not? Paula, at seventeen, was out and out

pretty, without a threat of any impending deformities of the flesh or spirit. Small wonder Otto's eyes, even while he sat stolidly of a Sunday and talked "leather bellies" and shoe findings with her father, were all delight for her.

How maddeningly precious she seemed to become to Kate just about then, as, trembling on the verge of her adolescence, beauty flashed out over her, eradicating little-girl freckles and knobby places at elbow and knee, rounding her sweet young bosom and creeping along her eyelids in the same crinkles of merriment that had once winked along Kate's.

It was about then, just after Paula had finished the one year of high school which was one more year of schooling than her mother had had before her, that the sly something began to take definite shape in Kate's mind.

Lovely Paula, already too schooled in the meager ways of being a Hossefrosse, must somehow save herself from her destiny of taking up life in her parents' footsteps. Kate could see it all so clearly. Otto and Paula, after the passing of Rudolph and Kate, carrying on. Carrying on.

Pretty Paula, with the crinkles along her eyelids gone, and the lights out of her hair, stooping with

Otto at sliding cheap shoes of the mode onto the great feet of the South Side servant girls; white-washing the brick walk that bisected the side yard; bearing her babes in the great ugly square bedroom that overlooked those whitewashed bricks, and hanging out their washings on a rope that was stretched across the upstairs porch outside the kitchen; sitting stiffly in church of Sunday mornings with her stiff Otto beside her, and worshipping before the stiff-eyed image that hung over the hand-crocheted altar cloth. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday . . . nick after nick along the Hossefrosse hickory stick.

At thirty, Paula would know life with her eyes shut; at least, she would know that little edge of life which had not passed her by. So much of life would pass Paula. So terrifyingly much. Strange, strange, that in all the years, even including the brief moment of her own rebellion, Kate had not realized until now, with the pollen of youth so brilliantly out on her offspring, how appallingly little of life had ever found its way into that lean gray brick house with the shoe-store front.

The newspapers, the motion-picture screen, the

customers' gossip, brought about the only hint of a life beyond that doorstep. Kate had been married for years before she even realized that romance had passed her by. Then Lina had taught her that. The Sunday magazine sections. The occasional visit to the stock-company or motion-picture theater. She began through them to realize that marriage was not the beginning and end of romance.

Paula, too, must be taught that. Take Mary Pickford. She was no more beautiful than Paula. There was that same blue sweetness to their eyes. Why, it was easy as anything to see the resemblance between them. Paula's hair, which Rudolph would not permit her to bob or curl, was lovely even in its tidy bound plaits. Gloria Swanson, whose hems were edged in romance, had no more dazzling smile than Paula's. It never troubled Kate to distinguish these favorites from the rôles they enacted.

As Otto's wooing became slightly more venturesome, the secret place in Kate's heart opened wider and wider. Otto was calling two or three evenings a week now, not excepting Sundays, and Rudolph, openly receptive, was offering him the highest tribute of his hospitality—one of the ten-

cent Habanas he kept beside a wet sponge locked away in the top drawer of the ceiling-high wardrobe of their bedroom.

Kate wanted to shout out to Paula that she was walking into a pit with her lovely eyes open. She wanted to shake Paula out of her dangerous tendency to conform. She wanted to dart venomous words into Paula's placid ear, warning her. And yet, outwardly, so that she despised herself, to every stricture, every narrow formula, every rigid receipt of behavior to which Rudolph subscribed, Kate outwardly conformed.

No, Paula must not wear her stockings rolled below her knees in the vulgar vogue that had crept down to the South Side.

No, Paula could not walk South Broadway of a summer evening with the phalanx of South Side girls who twined arms for a stroll and an ice-cream soda.

No, Paula could not stay out late for an ice-cream cone after choir practice.

No, Paula, could not join the new Dutch Treat Club. Dutch Treat indeed! Boys nowadays had no sense of responsibility, letting the girls pay for themselves. A fine come-off! You notice Otto had not joined the Dutch Treat Club. As

a matter of fact, he had not been asked, for no specific reason, it is true, but chiefly because he was not well acquainted with that particular group. He talked with an accent and that seemed to make a difference to the young folks. But when pinioned to the subject by Rudolph, Otto had submissively agreed that the right kind of a fellow did not begin life by dodging his responsibility. Dutch Treat? No, siree!

No, Paula could not join all those stage-struck girls who went every week to the Wednesday bargain matinées of the Mound City Stock Company. They were all "stuck on" a leading man named Laribee. He was a tall slim fellow, a perfect lover in his rôles, with a double wave in his rich dark hair and a beautiful sensitive profile. The girls cut his picture out of the newspapers and then sent them to him to autograph. Such nonsense! Thirty cents thrown away.

Once in a while, though, probably once a month, Kate and Paula attended a matinée together, usually on a rainy day when business was slack. There was no getting around it, there was something incontestably, incomparably exciting about Claude Laribee. Silly girls, of course, but what a lover he was in the rôles he played! Kate

knew that Paula had an autographed newspaper photograph of him tucked under the very last handkerchief in her glove-and-handkerchief box on her dresser.

Then there began to awaken in Paula herself resentments. Otto was all right one or two evenings a week and Sundays. Why, he was almost a beau, the first boy, in fact, she had ever been allowed to sit opposite long enough to elicit even his kind of blinking admiration. He liked her. He evidenced it in a half-dozen shy ways without ever putting it into broken English.

But now that Paula was out of school, the need for relaxation outside the long hours she spent at housework and in the store was greater than it had been.

It seemed to Kate that she could date the new restlessness from a *matinée* performance they had attended together, when both of them had sat forward in their balcony chairs, hands clasped and their breathing short.

Laura La Putte, the leading woman, was playing the rôle of a lovely, bad girl called Camille. Armand Duval, of course, was played by Laribee, love of whom was ultimately to save Camille from her evil life. There were moments in that play

which Kate could not conjure before her without a combination of pain and ecstasy that was almost more than she could bear. It was not alone the death scene—there were numerous other scenes between Armand and Camille—that somehow were packed with the meaning of life. They were too precious to look upon. They were to become symbols, to Kate, not only of what she had missed, but of the things that Paula must not miss.

That night they lay in their adjoining rooms, Kate beside her soundly sleeping spouse, Paula on her bed of chastity, wide-eyed, with an excitement that kept them both strangely, luminously awake. A wakefulness that neither of them would ever have dreamed of admitting to the other.

From then on Paula began to connive actively. There began small white lies to her father as to her whereabouts. To Kate, too, when she asked, but gradually, with a finesse, Kate left off asking.

RUDOLPH: "Where haf you been so late, Paula?"

PAULA: "Just walking, father. It grew late before I noticed."

RUDOLPH: "Always exguses for laciness. Your mother or me got no help from you."

Kate knew that Paula lied about where she had been. She would have known it by her daughter's eyes and the little tormented way she had of rolling them under the lie, but it so happened that the tiny edge of the Mound City Stock Company program protruded slightly from Paula's pocket.

Kate was glad.

Half a dozen times a week it happened thus, while to her strange delight, and at the same time her horror, she beheld her daughter become adept at the subterfuge and the evasion.

Paula, where have you been? Paula, where are you going at this time of the afternoon? You got run-around ways all of a sudden that don't suit me. Where was it you said you stayed so long?

At the grocery.

Lies. Lies. Lies.

Why so long?

Oh, Father, can't a girl stop to look in a shop window or two? For goodness' sake, I've been to choir practice, too! . . . Well, I know, but there was an extra rehearsal this week. . . . I'll do the dishes even if I am a little late, Mother.

Lies. Lies. Lies.

Paula was meeting Claude Laribee. Kate knew

that privately, exultantly, and at the same time with horror. There were telltale notes beneath the last handkerchief in the glove-and-handkerchief box; there were telltale flushes along her daughter's lovely cheeks.

Claude Laribee, who walked in the beauty of romance, was wooing a Hossefrosse. The fact that it was surreptitious could not seem to matter as it should. In spite of herself, Kate found herself conniving to make subterfuge easier for her daughter; covering up her absences when she could, explaining to Rudolph the unexplainable; keeping Paula's things washed, starched, ironed, as they had never been washed, starched, ironed before.

Locking up nights, Kate failed to draw the bolt any longer on the side door, in order to save her daughter the heavy groaning sound that might waken her father as Paula took to stealing out evenings after she was supposed to have gone primly to her bedroom. Kate knew! It was to meet Claude after his performance. Then she lay, scarcely breathing beside the snoring Rudolph until long past one or two, when she heard her daughter creak in again. To save those creaks, Kate secretly rubbed the floor with lemon oil.

She was glad, triumphantly glad, that Paula made no confidante of her. Then it would have been impossible for her to aid and abet, because with her lips Kate still echoed Rudolph's sentiments. That seemed to give Kate a sort of shallow solace. She forbade her daughter this. She forbade her daughter that. Shiftless American habits. Hand-to-mouthers. What was the world coming to? The modern girl had neither sense of duty nor responsibility. Run-arounds.

If the suspicion ever smote Kate that between Paula and Laribee, whom she was now meeting with a regularity that took away the breath of her mother, all was not as it should be, even that could not down the private exultancy that was hers.

As the stock company's summer season advanced towards its conclusion, it seemed to Kate that the beauty that was Paula's fairly took fire. How tender her lips! As if they had been kissed as never in all her life had Kate's been kissed. She was doubly gracious in her new beauty, even to Otto, as one is under pricks of conscience. A new nervousness gave her sparkle, where before she had been phlegmatic after the manner of

Hossefrosse resignation. Her father even remarked it.

"The more life she gets, the lacier."

And with a self-loathing that at times was almost more than she could bear, Kate slyly, skillfully, in a dozen ways, kept opening the cage. Motion-picture magazines found their way into the house to lie carelessly open, revealing the pretty, reckless faces of people who lived dangerously. At least they did in the opinion of Kate. Anything was better—even the unmentionable—than the dust-colored fate of a Hossefrosse that was hovering like a gray bat over the pretty Paula.

Every time that Otto came, Kate could see, with the exultancy in her heart, the dull eyes that Paula now turned upon this squat and stable fellow. His teeth were set so noticeably far apart, he cracked his finger joints, and for the first time Paula seemed to notice and complained hilariously to her mother. He had a square head and small eyes, and his touch was harsh and chapped.

All these little observations Paula vented merrily on her mother. That was as close as she ever approached to confidence. Kate saw to that.

Shame, Paula. Otto is a good, steady boy. He

will make some girl a good husband. Your father says he already knows a great deal about the shoe business. He comes from good respectable stock. You shouldn't talk so.

It was all Paula could do to control her mirth. The crinkles were out in merriment along her eyelids. The wrinkles were out of her heart. Night after night, as Kate lay beside the dead-to-the-world Rudolph, stiff with the agony and ecstasy of what she was doing, the vicarious, dear delight of Paula's daring to live dangerously swept over her in wave after wave of emotion. Thrill. Dread. Guilt. Pride. Hope. Fear.

But the fear was mostly for the possibility of Paula's failure. If only Paula were sly enough. For weeks Kate had left a small leather purse containing a one-hundred-dollar bill she had inherited at the death of a brother, lying uppermost on her dresser. To tempt. Laribee must be the sort of a man to demand finery in a girl. For Paula to take from Kate, who was her identical flesh, would not be sin. If only Paula would realize that!

It seemed to Kate, sometimes, that the one-hundred-dollar bill was Paula's way out. And yet she dared not do more than place it there.

She could only outwardly scold and contradict; forbid and corroborate Rudolph.

One day Kate heard that Laribee was married and had a wife and two children in Hollywood. She wondered if the neighbor who told it to her had done so innocently, or because gossip was abroad. To her terror it did not matter. To her supreme terror, even the wife and those two little children did not matter! Anything was better — sin — defeat — disappointment — despair — anything was better than that hovering gray bat of a Hossefrosse destiny.

Kate began to hate Otto. The way he masticated his beefsteak, when he came to suppers now on Thursdays, filled her with a kind of antagonism she could never recall having felt for anyone else in her life. He suggested to her the years and years of beefsteaks that a woman could prepare for a man who masticated slowly like that, for full flavor. Otto would grow meticulous about this foods, as Rudolph had. He would pare his square clean finger nails every evening after supper, as Rudolph did.

Life would be a very grave affair for the woman who married Otto, as it had been for the woman who married Rudolph. Respectability. Solidity.

Stability. You paid your debts and you expected others to pay theirs. You gave upon occasion, and you expected to receive. You were industrious, pennywise and not pound foolish. Be thou likewise. Otto, like Rudolph, had no impulse. He was Hossefrosse timber, all right!

And so, finally, the last week of the summer stock company season came to hand and the light that hovered over Paula became more and more apparent, not only to her mother, but to the customers in the store, who commented upon her new prettiness. But just the same, something tense and panic-stricken had crowded into the blue eyes.

What was going to happen? Would Laribee leave town alone after his season, or would Paula go with him?

To her unutterable shame, Kate found herself praying one night as she lay waiting for Paula. Send her away with him—no matter what—save her ——

And the next morning, when Paula, on the pretense of wanting a half-day off for shopping, begged release from store duty, Kate, to salve her scorching conscience, corroborated roundly Rudolph's refusal.

Getting to be a perfect gad-about. What's the world coming to? Extravagant nonsense!

Nevertheless, under pretext of sending her on an errand for herself, Kate finally contrived to hurry her daughter out of the house by *matinée* time.

Even to the obtuse Rudolph, Paula was high-strung and not quite herself these days. Love-sick, most probably. The young Otto must be brought to understand that his advances were welcomed. Rudolph resolved to wait a week or so and then speak to him. He admired his reticence, but there was such a thing as a young man being too backward. When he confided this to Kate, terror rose high within her.

The stock company was disbanding in three days. Kate had seen Laribee and Paula walking in beautiful Shaw's Gardens twice that week, as she skulked along by-paths, knowing it to be their retreat. They were like a pair of young gods.

No matter what came, Paula must have something of life, even its pain, if need be. Any kind of life, good or bad or indifferent, was better than a Hossefrosse death, as Kate had come to phrase it to herself.

God, give her courage to force life a little—and forgive me for I *do* know what I do. . . .

It was on a Sunday, the day after the closing of the Mound City Stock Company summer season, that Kate, walking into her bedroom from an early church service, noticed, as she crossed the threshold, that the little leather coin-purse containing the hundred-dollar bill was gone at last from her dresser! There was a note pinioned like a butterfly to the proverbial pin-cushion.

Paula had eloped! Or gone away—or whatever it was had been possible under the circumstances. Paula was free of the Hossie-Frossie. Tearing open the envelope, Kate's fingers were muddled and her eyes prayerful. It was a little note on ruled paper, with a tear splotch in its center.

DEAREST MOTHER, forgive your Paula. No matter what I have done that is considered bad, I love you. Claude is my happiness. He loves me and will take me where I will be happy. And the way I figure it, you would want me to be happy for a while rather than never at all, but Claude will make me happy always. Tell Father and Otto at the same time at Sunday dinner, mother dear, as by that time we will be on the train and you will hear from your daughter who loves you soon.

PAULA

P. S. Mother dear, I borrowed your hundred-dollar bill. I had to have things. I will return it and more.

It had happened. It Had Happened. IT HAD HAPPENED. The words enlarged themselves one by one, until they rang out like chimes. It had happened! Paula, for better or for worse, and it could only be for better, was free of the Hossie-Frossie.

Thank you, God.

In the blue-and-black-shotted silk that Kate wore under a bungalow apron while she prepared Sunday dinner, she sat down on the bed edge to tremble. No one ever sat on a bed edge at the Hossefrosse's. Shiftless American habit.

Paula was free. Terror of the sin her child was committing washed over her and then receded again, leaving her thankful. God would understand. It was no sin for an innocent prisoner to work his way out.

Paula was too pure at heart to ever really sin. And yet—and yet—confronted with the appalling task of explaining to Rudolph and Otto that Paula had gone away with a married actor, of whom they in all probability had never even heard, the whole thing, now that it had actually happened, lacked reality. Paula free. She would

not have to help pull off her father's heavy stiff shoes this morning when he came in from church. Or baste the roast. Or set the table for four, including Otto, who would walk home from church with Rudolph, wondering why Paula failed to meet them after choir as usual.

Paula would not have to sit down to the heavy gorge of Sunday dinner, or clear away, while her father stretched out in his chair for a doze with a newspaper over his face, or sit in the side yard with Otto as he indulged in his favorite pastime of drawing human figures without lifting his pencil from paper.

Paula would not have to wash gray calico house dresses on Monday mornings, because Paula would never have gray calico house dresses.

Paula would never again have to coax unyielding slippers onto unyielding feet during those gay bright hours of the evening when supple women like Paula were at their loveliest.

Paula would win, even if she lost.

God, forgive Paula the wrong she is doing, if she is doing it, and make Claude a good man to her.

God forgive me. . . .

That was what burned into her heart as she

prepared dinner that frantic morning, fumbling among objects that were familiar to her, clattering pans to the floor, forgetting to baste the roast, twirling the summer squash around the great yellow mixing bowl to the consistency that Rudolph liked, and then, to her horror, letting the bowl and all, whirl from her hands to the floor. Rudolph liked his summer squash of a Sunday dinner. Somehow he seemed entitled to it after his six lumbering days. Sometimes Kate went as far as Soulard Market shopping for summer squash.

Whirlwind after whirlwind of emotion smote Kate as she rushed through that Sunday morning.

Presently Rudolph and Otto would appear at the top of the flight of back stairs that led into the kitchen from the back yard. Otto and Rudolph would wash their hands at the kitchen sink and dry them on the roller towel and then proceed to the dining-room to sit at one end of the already set table to wait for the dishing-up. Or, if the weather was fine, sometimes they sat on the ledge of the upper porch, while Kate and Paula hastened around indoors at preparing dinner. Rudolph liked his seersucker in place of the heavy coat he wore to church. There was an extra one hung behind the door and sometimes he had Otto

change into it. This Otto did good-naturedly, feeling too Americanized by now in his dress, to really desire to appear in a seersucker coat before Paula, yet relaxing gratefully to the comfort of the lighter weight garment.

Paula was free!

Any moment now, Rudolph and Otto, who was already half Hossefrosse, would come plodding up those back stairs. Rudolph, as he washed his hands with brown soap, would be querulous because Paula had failed to meet them after choir. Otto would be furtively eager. He had a way of moistening his lips when he looked at Paula. Well he might, because she would have been a choice morsel for such a dull fellow. And now, without intervention on the part of Kate, without ever having given voice to the traitorous thoughts that had burned within her, Paula was free.

There! They were coming up the stairs already. O God—help me to tell them—there they were!

There they were *not*. It was Paula's frenzied footsteps falling over each other as she dashed up the stairs.

Paula—Paula—no, not you!

I'm in time, Mother? Tell me I'm in time—

they haven't come yet? Oh, thank God!— Oh, thank God!—I couldn't have stood it if I had been too late.

For what?

For Father and Otto—you haven't read them the note? Mother—quick—say you haven't.

Why, no! Why, no!

Thank God! Thank God! Mother, don't look at me like that!

Like what?

As if you didn't want me in the house. I was only crazy, Mother. I got my senses back at the station. I couldn't really do what wasn't right. He—Claude—kept making it sound all right, Mother, but when I got as far as the train, I knew, all of a sudden, I'm not the girl to live her life that way. I've come back to Otto, Mother, and to you and Father. Always—I'll be good—I'll try to be good——

You've come back. . . .

Mother—Mother, don't look at me that way—as if you didn't want me! I've been terrible—but just promise that you'll never tell Father or Otto about the note. Here's your Paula back, Mother, just as she's always been. Never bad—only so near being bad. . . .

Standing there with a steaming apple pie held out before her, and feeling ridiculous as she had never felt ridiculous before, the words began to rattle mechanically off of Kate's lips.

Bad girl. Stage-struck. Come to no good end. Disgrace to parents. Scandal narrowly averted. What's the world coming to. Shiftless ways breed evil living. Wastrel.

Then tears. The bitterest tears that Kate had accumulated in a lifetime. Tears, tears, because of the return of the prodigal, and still the stiff, machine-made phrases keep coming. Bad girl. Evil ways.

As if grateful for the excoriations, Paula humbled herself before the avalanche, dropped to her knees before her mother, and let her face fall into her hands, as if inviting her mother's tears to scald her.

"Get up," said Kate, and jerked her to a standing posture. Her eyes were blazing in a kind of wrath. Kate was licked and Kate was mad with pain.

You fool! You fool! You fool!

Mother, forgive. Claude's gone for good. O God, he's gone—for good!

Cry, you fool! Well you may cry! You fool!
You fool!

I won't cry for him, Mother, I promise you that. I'll settle down, dear, with Otto—just as you did with Father. You'll never tell on me, Mother—promise me you'll never tell. . . .

"Fool! fool!" cried Kate, and turned her back on her daughter as if the sight of her prettiness were only further flagellation that she could not endure. And so in a way it was. Paula was in a new suit, a natty blue one, that struck her at the knees and had a little military row of silver buttons down one side. New blond kid slippers she wore, the kind that Hossefrosses' did not carry in stock, and there were clocks to her stockings, and on her wrist a large leather handbag to match them. There was even a boutonnière of little ruby crystal cherries on her lapel. Nonsenses. Claude must have pinned them there. Just nonsenses. Some of the nonsenses that Kate had craved so for Paula. And for what?

"Mother, if you don't forgive me, I'll kill myself."

"I forgive you."

"Not in that heavy voice, darling."

"Not in a heavy voice."

"And you won't tell—ever——"

"I won't. . . ."

"Give me the letter."

"No, no. Let me keep it."

"Give me the letter. I couldn't rest if you didn't."

"Here it is."

It made sounds like little cries as Paula tore it to bits. There was nothing left now of Paula's rebellion as she crammed those bits into the stove. It had never been. It was a dream.

"Mother—That's Father and Otto now. Quick, let me climb out of these clothes."

It was the two of them arriving from the church, delayed, and Rudolph querulous because there had been no Paula on schedule.

Recriminations galore, as usual, and Paula quick with the ready-made little fib, throwing on the long-sleeved bungalow apron which her mother tore off and threw to her, until opportunity to change from the suit of the bright silver buttons into the uniform of a Hossefrosse Sunday afternoon.

Unreliable, these children of today. Loose American ways. Shiftless. Irresponsible. Don't let it happen again.

No, Father.

Off with her father's heavy, square-toed shoes.

How usual! How like a dream! How like a squirrel cage spinning its way with impeccable velocity. The dishing-up, with Paula scurrying at the chores which were already second nature to her.

Could Kate be dreaming that she was dreaming?

Yet, no, there was Rudolph, trying to fit together the fragments of the yellow bowl and making talk about carelessness and waste. Then there was a heavy jest from him as Paula tugged at his boots. It was good to have one's boots dragged off by a pretty girl, eh, Otto? Well, never mind, one must wait his turn.

Otto, whose feet were burning in his shiny yellow shoes, was proud of their American nattiness, but he drew them under his chair as he reddened. Oh, but it would have felt good to have Paula draw them off, too. How pretty her hands. Little curves that one liked to watch doing things. She could do things, all right. Just like her mother. Just like Otto's mother in Mannheim.

Kate kept moving through the idea of dreaming that she must be dreaming.

The men were in the dining-room now, waiting.

Paula, the soup! Rudolph liked it in a tureen, steaming hot. There were creamed onions, great pearly hen's eggs of onions. Otto always half resisted these, ogling Paula, and then, tormented and tempted at the same time, invariably capitulated. There was a roast that ran red juices and made Paula sway-back as she carried it in on its platter. The flanges of the men's noses, sniffing it, widened.

Rudolph and Otto were talking now of a new shoe firm that had opened a Sunlight Factory on the South Side. It left the women bits of time to cover themselves more securely with composure.

What a little curtain of a person Paula was! All drawn before herself. Who could have dreamed, from the *mädchen* composure of her face, that tornadoes had blown through it that very morning. There was composure even to the way her braids were bound around her head. How Kate had longed to see her head shorn of them and bobbed.

It was only in her eyes that the death, a much bigger one than her mother had died eighteen

years before, had taken place. It was doubtless the way the light was reflected, but it seemed to Kate, munching and munching from the meat to the potatoes and back again to the meat, that there was a small vertical dagger in each of them.

And yet Otto, even through the talk of the Sunlight Factory, try as he would to keep his respectful attention for Rudolph, could not keep his glance, excited, from sliding constantly around to Paula. His lips grew moister. He was ecstatically conscious of her. And she threw him her constant smile, with no pretense at subtlety.

Well, maybe it was for the best. The old pang of remorse at her incredible perfidy bit at Kate's breast. There was something to be said for the stability of these two stepping in to take hold where she and Rudolph must eventually leave off. Security was not to be winked at. Otto and Paula would procreate. They were strong young things. There was something about the flare of Paula's lovely thighs and the swell of her young breasts that made her fertility a foregone conclusion.

Paula would have children. Many of them. She would bear them in the black-walnut bed-

room with the chocolate-ocher wall-paper. Their washings would hang on the short rope across the upper back porch. Yes, Paula would have children. The first should be a little girl. Girls were cozier. . . .

Give This Little Girl A Hand

AMONG the legends that hovered over Rodeo West was one as gaudy as her very personality itself.

When Rodeo was fifteen years slimmer and less metallically daffodil of hair and brighter, if less fiercely blue, of eye, there was supposed to have been a shooting over her in the famous furtive crystal café of a Sacramento casino.

A Texas ranchman, crazed with Rodeo and drink, had fired at her and an Oklahoma prospector whose back yard, even as he slid an ingratiating hand along Rodeo's insinuatingly white arm, was gushing crude oil at the rate of fifty barrels an hour.

The first bullet aimed for one, or both, had crashed into a crystal chandelier, plunging the room into a semi-darkness which was immediately followed by blackness, as a cat-like manager, suspecting a raid, had clicked off three switches.

The second bullet, sent through the black with a madman's miracle of precision, had whizzed

straight for Rodeo's mitral heart valve, but due to a shoulder thrust up against hers in the dark, which sent her staggering out of range, it had only ignominiously nicked a bit of pink flesh off her ear lobe. A flash, a smear of blood not her own across the arm that had been so perilously stroked, and up went the lights.

Anyway, take it or leave it, that was the legend.

It behooved Rodeo to take it, to let it hang over her as glitteringly as the chandelier that had been shot into.

There were those who said that without the investment about her of such lore as this, whether trumped up or otherwise, there would have been no Rodeo West.

On the other hand, there were those who said that there could have been no stopping the sixty-mile-an-hour destiny of this lightning-flash of a song-and-dance darling of every oil-boom town between Tulsa and Pensacola.

Rodeo took no chances.

From the hour that the Oklahoma prospector who had slid the too ingratiating hand along her arm to suit the Texas ranchman, had staked her to a one-room café in her own Fresno, until Rodeo West's night-club in New York had become a

shrine of the sweet-butter and golden-egg men of a continent, that legend, embroidered and nursed by Rodeo and her publicity staff, had grown in glitter.

And so had Rodeo.

Prohibition, to say nothing of a personality which caused men in one-horse boom-and-gulch towns to skulk around nights for the possibility of her shadow moving across her drawn window-shade, had conspired to make of Rodeo a sort of Statue-of-Liberty-Outraged, standing blonde, defiant, gorgeous of vitality and raiment, at the head of the national Main Street called Broadway.

Rodeo West's night club-cabaret slaked your thirst with one hand and greased the hand of the law with the other.

Nobody knew precisely how she did it, nor cared, except that Duluth, Great Falls, Mobile, Joliet, Topeka, Evansville, Wheeling, and St. Paul went down into conservative, back-bone-of-the-nation wallets and paid five dollars for under-cover charges, seven dollars and seventy-five cents for Ham-and-Egg-Rodeo, three dollars a pint for White Rock, and four dollars for the additional "two fingers" of the golden glow of the Scotch, theirs not to reason why.

Hands that had come East to buy china cups and saucers, stylish stouts, wool cheviots, tin tags, veiling, shirting, leather hides, artificial flowers, infants' wear, ladies' dresses, children's coats, misses' suits, boys' caps, maids' aprons, table linen, scissors, human hair, and wardrobe trunks on a penny-biting margin, paid their two-hundred-and-forty-six-dollar check for five hours of Rodeo's midnight-to-dawn revelry and went back to their hotels with enough devil-may-care elixir tucked behind their headaches, to last them until the next annual buying trip East.

Rodeo, if your values were her sort of values, gave you your money's worth. Good food, safe drink, a close-up gape at celebrated patrons, and eighteen of the youngest, tenderest, love-em-and-leave-em's that Rodeo's brains and money could procure.

It took both. Scouts scoured the back streets of back towns where Ziegfeld and Hollywood had not trekked, for the chance find of a bit of tender beauty that could fling a little ankle, roll a baby eye, and not recoil—so you at least could notice it—from the exigency of the slightly plump or slightly damp hand of caress.

It was said, what with the Broadway vogue

of her night club of twelve feet of dancing floor, very low lights, no ventilation, jungle of gilt-paper palms, small square tables each with a black-and-gold-shaded lamp, background of gilt, full moon rising out of a gilt-paper river that did a convincing shimmer, that Rodeo, who had come out of the West with only the legend, a "family" composed of relatives, friends, and a hanger-on or two, had made close to a million dollars on the strength and weakness of the Eighteenth Amendment.

That was scarcely true. At the time when Rodeo was charging three dollars a bottle for mineral water and slightly more for just enough Scotch to amber it; while her left hand was greasing the palm of the law and her right was receiving a much heavier coating from the public, it is nearer the truth to estimate Rodeo's nest egg, which she kept conservatively distributed in six savings banks at a low rate of interest, at two million and three-quarters.

Well, you might not approve of her, but for the life of you there was no way to escape the gale of this personality known as Rodeo West.

At thirty-six, in an age when the Venus of Melos was considered a bit hippy, hefty, and too

womanly of chest, Rodeo was almost measure for measure of those Hellenic proportions. The same flexuosity of torso, the swinging hips, the high shoulders, and the chest thrust slightly ahead of the body were hers.

Rodeo had white skin which she whitened. Yellow hair which she gilded, and the enviable endowment of thick black lashes around blue eyes, which lashes she thickened and blackened with mascara.

People who liked phrases, were fond of saying that it was enervating to be in the same room with Rodeo because she sapped their vitality.

A pretentious way of putting something that meant nothing. What they might have explained was that the avalanche of Rodeo's vitality, pouring down over the glitter of her personality, caused those around her to seem to recede as if some unseen force were spiriting them out of the room backward.

Old Sam Waller, the Oklahoma prospector who had staked Rodeo to her first café in Fresno, said of her just before he died of a very fatty degeneration of the heart, "Hereafter cain't hold no scare for Rodeo. She's got more fire in her little finger than all the hell there is."

Broody Beeth, who might be classed as one of hangers-on, who had a rugged, tormented-looking face and who could say bitter disillusioned things between closed teeth, and still be endured because he had a useless right arm which he carried close to his body as if it were in a sling, once said of her that she was either an angel with horns or a devil with wings.

Rodeo's mother was more colloquially to the point. "She's the damnest darlin' breathin', bless her blamed little soul. . . ."

The Hudlers, Ma and Pa, Mamie-Sue (Rodeo West), and a second daughter 'Sippie, married and divorced and married again to one and the same Sime Carson, who alternately beat her and covered the bruises with kisses, Ma's narrow, unwed sister Vingie, and most of the time Brood, slept by day in a large nine-room housekeeping apartment in a family hotel on Broadway near Seventy-second Street, and gathered by night around a table very specially private to them, in the rear of Rodeo West's night club-cabaret.

Sam, before the degeneration got him, had contended that all this family exposure was bad business. What the public did not know did not hurt them. How could Rodeo expect to keep any il-

lusions about herself with the not unraucous voice of Ma Hudler and her great beet-red arms and shoulders overflowing her evening gown of bright green sequins. Or Pa Hudler with his stiff evening-shirt-dickey sliding all too often to reveal flash of red flannel beneath, or 'Sippie and Sime wrangling right there in the midst of New York and points-west's smart fast set.

To which Rodeo poked a long, strong pink tongue against her cheek. Law me! As if Sam himself hadn't kept every one of his illusions about her, toadied to her like a queen, and as if he hadn't known her back in the days when the Hudlers lived in a rear shanty on Fresno Street eking out their three-a-days between Ma's wash line and Pa's brick hod!

"If I can stand for the old man and the old girl," Rodeo was wont to say, with a sweep of her white beautiful arm, "I don't see why the public should be let off. Atta-Mumsie, am I right?"

"Go to hell, honey," was the not unusual maternal rejoinder, Ma patting the little pads of fat on the backs of her pudgy hands after a mannerism she had acquired as they gradually had become soft and white.

No, it could not be said of Rodeo that she

GIVE THIS LITTLE GIRL A HAND 237

threw off family ties. Her aunt Vingie, who sniffed constantly in threes, and then always as if the world were her vinegar barrel, was not one to endear the home fires, and life among Sime and 'Sippie was not all beer and skittles.

But while Rodeo may not have had much time to give them during the course of the all-night sessions of the club-cabaret, there they were, just the same, big as night life, sipping their high balls the early part of the evening, digging into sirloin-and-onions, broiled baby lobster, hashed browns, corn-on-cob-any-season, Haute Sautern or Paul Roget by the time the balloons and confetti began to fly, and along about sunrise time welsh rarebit, ale, and for the old man a raw hamburger-steak sandwich which he liked with a wash-down of gin and ginger beer.

In fact, the old man, who could have posed for a caricature of a caricature of Uncle Sam, was all innocently responsible for the raw-meat-sandwich, gin-and-ginger-beer craze which struck night club New York shortly after a Rodeo Club celebrity-patron had ordered "One of those sandwiches like the old Uncle Sam over there at that table sitting next to the lady walrus in green spangles is putting under his red flannel."

These sandwiches, which came to be known as Red Flannels, were of the restaurant-wagon brand of raw meat on rye, a lettuce leaf containing onion on the side. They cost the reveler at Rodeo's one dollar and seventy-five cents per hamburger-steak sandwich.

From exactly fifteen minutes after the last kick, whoopla, and tag-line had been flung across the footlights of eighty-eight New York theaters, up to the first slit of dawn that climbed and climbed to reach the city's roof-tops, Rodeo had been on the balls of those two slim, white, aching feet.

And that was the least of it. Rodeo's appurtenances, caparisons, cabaret, wine, women, song-and-dance to the contrary notwithstanding, was a one man show. And that one man was Rodeo.

During the eight-hour, sixty-miles-an-hour session of that night club of hers, Rodeo was Statue-of-Liberty-Outraged, standing magnificent at the cross-roads of the world.

Give me liberty, quarts and quarts of it!

The socially and professionally celebrated and uncelebrated seekers after surcease, all the way from Bangor to San Diego, from Richmond to Beverly Hills, looked to Rodeo for the particular

kind of escape from reality it was her peculiar gift to bestow.

With her eighteen matched and matchless love-em-and-leave-em's dancing and prancing, two jazz orchestras in gilded derby hats keeping the cacophony continuous, forbidden ambers foaming and sizzling in teacups, and ear-splitting din compressed into the perfumed jungle that you entered through a Moorish-red tunnel hung in Sicilian sunsets, Rodeo herself, scintillant in the sequin gowns she loved, untiring, all-seeing, with one eye out for plain-clothes men and the other out for all men, personally received her guests.

Personally, in a sense of the word that is rigid, because no reindeer-meat dealer from Nome, a roll of fat on the back of his neck and a roll of bills in his pocket, was too obscure or remote to have escaped her memory, provided he had been there once before. Poet, banker, grub-staker who had struck, man-about-any-town, butter-and-egg man, or magnate, elk, turfman, dilettante, social personage, grand dame or dame, girl-friend, girlie, or just "the wife" never arrived at Rodeo's a second time unrecognized by name and handshake.

She knew them by name, by fame, and by infamy; by place and by Dun's, Bradstreet, *Social*

Register, or *Who's Who*. She could tell you the size of the last check they had paid, the date of the last divorce, the size of young scion's inheritance, the vintage of a "lady friend," or the high-ball limit of the Colonel from Memphis, Tennessee.

There were sternly observed limits to the joy-of-living at Rodeo Club. No patron ever staggered in or out of that red tunnel of an entrance if Rodeo could help it, and help it she could! Tipsy, yes, but as a gentleman becomes tipsy. As a poet should become tipsy. As a banker. As an artist. But take it from Rodeo, it was not always the poet who wore his cups with the grace due to the lady whose ruling portals he darkened.

Rodeo could count off on two hands, just like that, at random, ordinary cloaks-and-suiters, men with no bid to social or professional class, who could carry a quart of Haute Sauterne in a manner to shame sniveling poet or scion of Long Island.

Rodeo could wax philosophical upon her observations and deductions upon man's ability to carry his cups.

Show me the way a man says "Sister Sue" after two high balls, and I'll tell you if his mother

GIVE THIS LITTLE GIRL A HAND 241

reared him or just raised him. Show me whether a man can keep his eyes in the center of his eyeballs after he has a gentleman's portion of gin in him, and I'll tell you whether I'd trust my sister out with him or not.

To which Brood would smile off the northeast corner of his mouth, which was the cynical corner.

A word about Brood. Legend had it—again legend, which to Rodeo was as heady as wine—that he had been a child-prodigy violinist until a paralysis of his right arm had left it a limp wing which he carried huddled to him.

It is true that Rodeo knew little more of the authenticity of this legend than the rest. One somehow did not approach this subject with Brood any more than one would walk up and tickle the soles of a Buddha in a Chinese temple. Legend also had it that of all Rodeo's hangers-on (there was an overweight jockey named Joe who twelve years before recovered from pneumonia at Rodeo's expense and had gone on recovering ever since) Broody was most of all the one who played Rodeo for a "good thing."

Ever since the family had traveled across country from Fresno he had been part of the outfit,

in various capacities of steward, right-hand man, general manager, host, cashier, a hireling who wore custom-made shoes, impresario top-coats with fur collars, and a monocle with a thin gold rim that fitted under the deep eaves of his eye and shone there like the entrance to an artesian well.

It was known that the family objected to his boorish ways and that Rodeo herself could flare back at his easy irascibilities and yet be the first to make the overture of reconciliation. It was said she was in love with him. Was married to him. That she had been married to him and wanted to gather him back unto herself as she had made it possible for her sister 'Sippie to recapture Sime after a four-thousand-dollar divorce.

It was also said that Brood was Ma Hudler's son by another marriage. It was even said he was Rodeo's stepson by an ancient marriage back in the wildcat days.

His bitterness of manner, and the melancholy of his temperament, had wrung from Rodeo one of the most inexorable of her nicknames. Broody Beeth. Broody, because in a dark, stern way he was so sensitive about the huddled arm. Beeth,

because Rodeo declared he had the same lowering stormy brow of the print of Beethoven that had always hung about their house, even in the shanty days.

High and ugly words could pass between them, and one rumor had it that the limp arm was a result of defending her in a duel that had taken place back in the Fresno days.

Fact was, although Rodeo loved to let these legends grow and gather the spangled kind of moss that threw out glamour, Broody was just what he seemed to be—a nervous, frequently trying retainer in her entourage, whom she had permitted to become outrageously familiar with all the conditions surrounding her life, and to whom she turned for advice, judgment, and not infrequent censure.

Many of the innovations that made Rodeo so outstandingly and daringly herself were admittedly traceable to Broody's showmanship.

Imagine daring to snap her fingers at threat of padlock never-to-fall, and Federal intervention, and then in the same breath draw stern line in her night club where tipsiness leaves off and inebriation begins.

Broody's inauguration that, and the patrons

stood for it. Broody's inauguration, the face that all eighteen of Rodeo's love-em-and-leave-em's attended day school, which was their way of going to night school, for the acquisition of such social amenities as the unsplit infinitive, the square root of $\times \frac{1}{2}$ and the difference between the Limas, Peru, Indiana, and bean.

A master stroke, that, which set the beauties of Broadway all agog over erudition and flashed Rodeo's eighteen into rotogravure the country over, under the caption:

"RODEO WEST'S PRETTY EIGHTEEN BEND THEIR PRETTY BROWS OVER THE THREE R'S."

They were just that—Rodeo's pretty eighteen. And she was fierce and maternal and proprietary over them, boosting some of them to musical-comedy and music-hall fame on the contagious and high-handed demands she made for their talents.

"Give this little girl a hand."

Rodeo, who claimed that she had a bit of George Cohan, of William Jennings Bryan, of P. T. Barnum, and of Billy Sunday in her make-up, shot forth these tender young entertainers from the cannon of her own enthusiasm.

"Here's a little girl—boys. Wancha to make

her acquaintance. She was born in a town called Plympton Green, and say now she looks it, boys. Don't she? Just as fresh and as sweet as the new-mown hay. Give her a hand, boys. That little girl can dance."

It did not matter much whether she could or could not. The "boys" gave her a hand, and expected one, at least, of hers in return. Rodeo's girls were taught to "mix." And over their morals she exerted the same terrific sort of maternalism that she did over their three R's.

The tales, the dilemmas, the plights, and the puzzlements that had been sobbed into Rodeo's magnificent, powdered, perfumed bosom must have kept it warm and beating with all of the quick sympathies for which she was notorious.

Rodeo fought for the so-called morals of her girls like a tigress. Sometimes she failed, but always insisted that more often she succeeded.

Broody bore her out in that.

Ma Hudler declared it was a shame the way Rodeo wore herself out over those blamed brats.

Pa sucked a smelling pipe and kept a silent head on him.

'Sippie and Sime agreed with Ma.

Sundays, the only day out of the seven the

family enjoyed at home, these colloquies usually took place.

Rodeo loved the relaxation of this day and sat around the pretentiously gilt-and-brocade hotel apartment in a pink plush wrapper trimmed with ermine tails, and played solitaire most of the afternoon over camomile tea and rings of smoke.

The old man frankly relaxed to his stockinged feet, waistcoat slipped on over his red flannel, and Rodeo, when 'Sippie demurred, said, "God love him, let him live."

To Broody, who wore his monocle in the morning, the waistcoat over the red was equally distasteful, and at this point he usually threw down his newspaper and walked out of the room.

Long, colloquial, blessed Sunday. Rodeo was like nothing so much as a big sleepy cat. Vingie, who looked like a witch and could swear like a trooper, prepared dish after dish on the electric ring, and cloyed up the somnolent air with everything from frizzed bacon to sizzled bologna.

The old man exuded "Ah's" that revealed his tonsils, as the flock of ginger-beer jugs on the table beside him thickened. 'Sippie and Sime, over the colored supplements, alternately quarreled and embraced.

Occasionally Rodeo let out a yell of nervousness at their wranglings, and then coiled into herself again with the luxurious, winding coziness of a great cat.

Sunday!

Even Broody reverted to something. Nobody quite knew what, but most of the day he sat at the white-and-gold baby-grand piano (gift of Big Buster Bill—cattle king) picking out with his left hand, one-note melodies that had their source far from Tin Pan Alley. Back somewhere in Saalburg and Bayreuth.

Sometimes Rodeo would glance up from her solitaire. "What's that, Brood? God! it's pretty."

Broody never replied. It was not wise to press him on any subject, music or anything pertaining to his malformity, least of all.

Often he struck four arresting notes and then stopped as if commanding attention.

Beethoven struck those four arresting notes at the beginning of his Fifth Symphony and commanded the attention of the universe!

Neither Rodeo nor any of the Hudlers, all of them familiar with Broody's habit of striking those four notes, knew that.

It was all just part of the routine of a Sunday:

Ma Hudler in hair frizzes and the diamond laval-liere Rodeo had given her on her fortieth anniversary, dozing and puffing her dry lips on the sofa; Vingie pottering at the electric stove; Pa Hudler asleep with a newspaper over his face; 'Sippie and Sime finally oozing out for a drive in Rodeo's Rolls-Royce.

That usually left Rodeo and Broody alone for the clearing up of all the loose ends of the week.

He knew her like a book.

To his place at the piano, without turning his head, came the slapping down of the cards. The long luxurious yawn, with Rodeo's arms, blazing with gems, winding and waving, bare and beautiful, out of the pink-plush angel sleeves with their ermine tails dangling. Her account books would be on the lower ledge of the table upon which she had been at cards. There would be the cup of tea and bottle of white crème de menthe and a tiny glass at her elbow. Rodeo saved her parsimonious appetite for drink for her patrons. But on Sundays she craved the warmth of liquor. "They build a fire in my soul, and I've got to keep the soul fires burning."

Broody knew better. He knew her love affairs, or rather her affairs. They were not infre-

quently included in the Sunday reckonings. They would have surprised the New York that knew her as its gaudy jest. Rodeo was less amorous than her eyes.

To be sure, men desired Rodeo. Perhaps no longer the slim waistless cowboys of the days when young prospectors could have placed diadems, made of the raw gold nuggets, upon her brow.

Men with paunches under their waistcoats and under their eyes were more usually desirous of Rodeo these days. Which is not to omit the fact that a world-famous juvenile sheik out of Hollywood sent her fourteen dozen roses a week, and was author of her diamond anklet.

But on the other hand, the number of men who looked to her for advice, just impersonal advice about family, money, and business affairs, was what would have surprised the New York, the Duluth, the Spokane, and the Fort Worth that came to gape at the Rodeo of the too-low sequin gowns, the too-flashy gems, the too-raucous voice and the too-ready laugh.

A broker in Cincinnati, with an unfaithful and designing wife, kept certain deeds and documents for his baby son in her safe keeping.

One of the Fresno boys, who had since made

a fortune in Brazilian coffee, nursed a superstition that no investment could carry luck without the stamp of her approval. Her choker of thirty-two enormous, matched, and perfect pearls attested to that.

The twelve-inch, bowknot brooch of square diamonds that Rodeo wore on her gown of black sequins was the gift of a Minneapolis turfman who had named the winning pride of his stables Rodeo.

Young fellows about town, many of whom were to outgrow and consciously forget her in the conservatism of maturity and position, unburdened their heartaches, their love affairs, and dreams across sixty dollars' worth of ham and eggs, Scotch and Extra Dry.

Rodeo would fight these men like a tiger for the virtue of her love-em-and-leave-em's. Three of them she had succeeded in marrying off to these youths of social prominence and wealth. On the other hand, she had been known to bodily eject, by the well-known scruff of the neck, him who overstepped.

Her girls were there to entertain. But up to a point, and that point was 3 A.M. on her dance floor.

After that she kept them in an apartment in her same family hotel, presided over by Vingie.

Tucking them in (they adored her), smoking a final cigarette with them, sitting in her sheer, beautiful nightgowns on the edge of their taffeta-and-lace beds, was Rodeo's last waking act each night.

She expected value-received out of her girls. A bald head might be unlovely to the lovely touch of a love-em-and-leave-em, but you didn't pay seven dollars and fifty cents for ham-and-eggs and three dollars for mineral water in-the-white, so to speak, just for the ham-and-eggs and the *aqua pura*.

Business is business.

On the other hand, once she had traveled the eight hundred miles to Indianapolis with a young weak sister—one who had been loved and left—to deposit her personally, and with insistence that she be tenderly received, back into the bosom of her family.

Yes, Rodeo would fight for these girls. Men sensed that. All things considered, men as a class had been pretty square shooters with Rodeo. Respectable, Middle West Rotarians had gone through the hell's fire of local notoriety sooner

than relinquish their claims to her platonic friendship.

A clergyman, God was Rodeo's judge, had once wanted to renounce pulpit for passion for her.

"'Z God is my judge, Brood, if I was to tell you where he is tending flock now and who he married, you'd say, 'Rodeo, you're lying.'"

No, Brood would not have.

He shared with Rodeo the knowledge that, though many men desired her, none had achieved her.

"If my public knew I was just an old virgin, a real virginious one, and that my peck of jewels had cost me palaver, lots of it, and that's all, I'd lose my prestige. I'd kill all the geese that lay around to eat my golden ham-and-eggs. If my public knew about me what I know about myself, I'd be back slinging hamburger sandwiches, hand-made, at the price God intended they should be et."

Broody knew there was truth in what she said, but for the life of him he was never able to restrain what was almost a sardonic snarl along his lips as she recited.

It rasped so, to hear her, as if some one were scraping a nail file along a slate.

And yet Rodeo could chatter on and on against the sounding-board of Broody. The richest man in Ogden had made overtures to her. Pest! A pious kind of Peter, too. This business gives a fellow a look-in on life that beats anything a deacon could hope to behold through a peephole. Revenue fellows better know when to stop or she'd let them padlock the place sooner than be ridden for a good thing. We better put in a few more lights back off the dance floor, Brood. Those corners can look powerful dark! Broody better check up on the gin. Young Stephie Welch mustn't bring that bad girl from the Paris music halls around any more. She gets the boys wild and ugly. The love-em-and-leave-em's need a new act, Brood. That September Morn ballet still goes pretty strong, but it's got barnacles. Two fellows from Idaho complained they'd seen it the last time they were in town. Beat this one! Billy Vandover runs up a eighteen-hundred-dollar check last night, and then tries to short change the cigarette girl. But not while Aunt Rodeo was playing her searchlights over the picture. Like me in my new ermine coat, Brood? Summer ermine, it is called. God love it, oughtn't to sit

around home in it of a Sunday, but just cuddling up in its softness is like riding to glory-hallelujah in a mother-of-pearl Rolls-Royce. Eddie Kline set himself back six thousand for it, which was a cheap way, I'll say, of meeting a business obligation, considering the number of boys I've sent his way when they were buying furs for—er—for girl friend. Am I the whole hen-roost, Brood?

Yes, Rodeo was the whole hen-roost.

"Brood, speaking of roosts, if words were hen's teeth, you'd have them all pulled out, wouldn't you?"

"Your humor," said Brood, "is like the milk Vingie served with this coffee—it's curdled."

"It's a wonder to me I've got any left to curdle. Shall I send that little Valerie girl back home, Brood, or give her another try? That kid's slipping, and nothing I can say either to her or the Patent-leather Kid is enough to make them use the brakes. He's within his rights. How do I know he's not courting her, only I could swear he's not. She was a nice kid when she came to us, Brood. I'm going to send her back home that way if I've got to spank her all the way from here to Chattanooga. If she's got to go wrong, she's

got to do it down somebody else's toboggan slide."

"I'll ride her back home. I've always told you never fool around with an albino blonde. They've pink in their eyes. Pale blood."

"'Sippie and Sime's begging for a Suiz Hispano roadster, Brood. Guess it is right humiliating, if you've got any spirit of your own, to have only the use of my car on the edge of the time I'm not using it."

"Yes indeed. Poor 'Sippie and Sime have a bad time of it only having the use of your lemon-colored Rolls-Royce all day and every day except the couple of hours you use it."

"Well, you don't need to rub it in. They're kin."

"There are certain things that can't be rubbed in to you, Rodeo. You haven't got a saturation point."

"A what? Say, now, that's what I need to make my life complete. Hey! give this Broody-boy a hand! He pulled one! I haven't got saturation!"

"Oh, go to the devil!" said Brood, and walked over to the piano and began picking out, with his

left forefinger, the four sonorous raps which open the Fifth Symphony.

"Those damn four raps!" blurted out Rodeo, suddenly. "Damn those four raps!"

As usual while at the piano, he was impervious to human voice.

"Damn those four raps was what I said!" repeated Rodeo, and suddenly, wrapping her ermine and her pink plush trailing about her, got up and kicked over a gilt-and-tapestry footstool.

"Why?" said Brood, and sat with his forefinger on the last G that had been rapped out.

"How the hell do I know why! It's because—because you're forever saying, 'Listen, World,' with those four raps of yours, and then there's not a blamed thing to listen to," said Rodeo, and flounced out, leaving a light fog of powder, a haze of scent, and the bang of a slammed door to die on the air.

The Sunday afternoon thickened, darkened, passed out, and still Brood sat on in the room alone, his forefinger on the G that had been struck, and his nervous, bitter face sunk toward the right arm that he carried close to his body like a wounded wing.

Those of her well-wishers who saw it coming were loud in their praise that if any one deserved it, Rodeo did.

The skeptics and the men and women who line Broadway and have wolf out in their faces, shrugged shoulders of innuendo and incredulity.

But even the men and women with the wolf out in their faces were scarcely to be blamed for their wiseacre askance this time.

It was incredible to the degree of being fantastic.

And do not think that Rodeo's point of view was not just that.

Fantastic.

She told Oldfield that to his face, and he slapped her beautiful bare shoulder until the powder flew, and said, by Jove! that might be, but that didn't change the number of Mother Carey's chickens.

It happened within a fortnight, the way things like this usually must happen, if they are going to happen at all.

There were precious few magnates, social, industrial, or professional, who came to town without falling into Rodeo's golden net.

It was her boast.

You just hadn't been to New York if you had not night-clubbed at Rodeo's and carried away a gilt razzle-dazzle, a head, and a freshly entered stub in your check-book.

Somehow Florence Oldfield had passed Rodeo by, so to speak, chiefly because in the last five years he had not been farther east than Saratoga, except on two fleeting occasions. Once for a day to see his famous Zip win a derby at Belmont Park, and on another for a half day, when he raced in from a brief sojourn at Saratoga, to see the international motor races.

The picturesque turfman, oil king, ranch magnate, and cattle-breeder preferred his castle that stood on an artificial crag outside of Galveston and dominated the plains. It had a moat, and a portcullis was approached by a two-mile upgrade speedway as modern as macadam and as mediæval in aspect as the lair of a Saxon despot.

The night he drifted into Rodeo's with a party of fifteen, including a famous yacht-owner with whom he was spending just the one day in the metropolis, a racing celebrity or two, an ex-mayor of Galveston, and some pert girls they had gathered like blond moss along the way, it was not

five minutes before word of his presence was abroad.

That was the way Rodeo's system worked. It was her business to know the among-those-present. The celebrated figures who ventured into her play world were part of the sly psychology that made it a privilege to be either the observed or the observer at Rodeo's.

The observers, with elks' teeth on their watchguards and sleeve garters under their coats, gaped as great names and the personalities themselves swam into their ken. The observed ones, after the first shock of spotlight and fanfare, took it all in good part, secretly full of the kind of satisfaction that comes with being recognized by the head waiter.

The night that Florence Oldfield swam into the ken of the Club Rodeo, it is doubtful if Rodeo was in any better form than usual. You cannot raise to the superlative that which is already superlative. And Rodeo at her positive and comparative was superlative. She exuded, plunged, cataracted, foamed, and sprayed as naturally as a tawny waterfall.

"Friends," she cried, the evening of the invasion of none other than Florence Oldfield and

the fifteen in party, "give this poor boy from Galveston-and-points-south-and-west a h a n d ! He's got a girl's name, but I'm here to tell you, folks, that he's got a man-size handshake from the feel of it, and from what I hear of it he's got a lion's heart. Give him a hand, folks! Ah, there! Come, there! Another and another and another. Place it there, bo. I'm glad to see you, and I hope everybody's well out in Galveston and that the wall-by-the-sea is behaving the way a wall-by-the-sea should behave, seeing it's a wall-by-the-sea. Give him another hand, folks. Welcome him to Rody's by the Rodeo, and maybe he'll give us all little souvenir Zips for our birthdays. Give him a hand, folks. Up! Let them see you, Oldy! Let them see how the big man from the big castle from the West looks at a close-up."

Of course Oldfield registered the usual sheepish discomfort as he rose to his six feet, and the observers of the observed felt repaid for the three-dollar White Rock and the four-seventy-five chicken sandwich, having seen the great Oldfield, knee to knee, so to speak. And the two jazz bands struck up "Dixie," and quick as you could bat your eye, Rodeo, glittering with enough square-

cut gems to light up the Styx, and a group of the tenderest and the fairest of the love-em-and-leave-em's with the mamma-baby voices, and the oh-boy eyes, gathered around the Oldfield table for golden massacre.

And golden massacre it was!

When Florence Oldfield, erect and unswaying, the whole six feet of him, paid his check at five o'clock of the day that was climbing like a sailor up a rope over the New York house-tops, Broody handed the waiter exactly three hundred and one dollars (which was to be his keep-the-change) out of the two crisp one-thousand-dollar notes that Oldfield had spread on the plate as his check was presented to him.

Such largesse was not without its precedent at Rodeo's. The night that the son of a Peruvian gold-mine owner had entertained the son of a maharajah, Broody had been called upon to break only slightly into four one-thousand-dollar notes. But what made Oldfield's case unique was that for fourteen consecutive nights, his erstwhile plans for an immediate return to Galveston notwithstanding, his well-proportioned two hundred pounds, immaculately clad and with three registered and well-known pearls for studs, occupied

the same table at practically the same nightly expenditure. Eighteen and twenty who were his guests crowded with him into the raucous, scented, jazz-splintered paradise that was Rodeo's while love-em-and-leave-em's slid on and off of broadcloth knees, patted bald heads, and tilted back their young throats for the adorable gulp of champagne trickling and tickling.

But for Oldfield, who sought privacy in a crowd, there was one and only.

Rodeo.

From the very start, when he had first clapped eyes on her as she dawned upon him like one of those terrific Arizona sunrises he had grown up with, Oldfield had eyes for Rodeo and Rodeo only.

It may have amused her, it may have bored her, but first and last of all, it behooved her to be receptive to his unbridled admiration. Big, pink, and eupeptic, Southern of drawl and Western of manner, humoring him was not the obnoxious business it could sometimes be.

He had bright, brown, snapping eyes, and shoulders that looked as if they would tolerate no burden of fat. Slim hips. Heavy dark-red lips that closed firmly under a brown mustache. If there was anything about Oldfield to belie his

fifty-three years, it was the bright brown tint of that mustache. He should have let it go gray. . . .

Well, anyway, when Rodeo sat down and placed her long beautiful arm across his shoulders and smiled with her big square white teeth and let out that foggy siren's voice of hers, it was not so bad, by a long way, as what she was used to many-a-night-after-many-a-night.

Oldfield might just as easily have been as old as such frequenters as Senator Bradfield, who had a face the shape of a Turkish slipper, or as damp-looking as a certain judge whose daughter had recently married into a family of British nobility that stood breathtakingly near to the throne.

As it was, Oldfield had a certain big pink-fleshed hail-fellow-well-met, cold-shower, wide-open-spaces well-being about him.

And he liked Rodeo. And as a confirmed bachelor, who was already counting on bequeathing his castle-on-the-crag to the city of Galveston for a museum, he was not slow about saying so.

"Say, honey, I'm just crazy about you. I jest never dreamed there was anything like you laying around this here old earth for an old fellow like me to run into."

"Honest now, honey, now didn't you? Wal, I do declare! There's jest as good fish in the ocean as ever come out of it. Come on, honey, let me hear you say 'cain't.' When you say 'cain't,' you sound jest like my cat smelling Vingie open a can of fish."

Repartee, as Rodeo put it, also "behooved her." Sometimes not so good. No, sir, not quite so good, but repartee pure and simple, just the same. Not always, again according to Rodeo, quite so pure as simple, but the boys, God love em, liked it that-away. She was an equal for Oldfield, all right.

Night after night she sat at his table in the rintin-tin and the din-din-din, egging him to expenditure, swapping lingo and phraseology with him, while the forbidden fluids flowed and the crystal rang.

Up to the night of Oldfield's arrival, Rodeo's right arm, firm, chiseled, and of proportions that would have enabled it to fit right on to the antedated Venus of Melos, had boasted twenty-six diamond-and-emerald bracelets. A glittering armor that encased her halfway from wrist to elbow.

After Oldfield had prolonged his visit to New York from one day to fourteen, six additional

diamond, emerald, and Oriental pearl bracelets shone there.

"Rodeo-honey, bless my soul if you don't look like one of those fronts to a Broadway theater on the opening night of a new Cecil de Mille movie. Honey child, quit glittering thataway and give your uncle Remus a kiss."

"Go long, Brer Rabbit, you. Honey-chile won't allow for no moh your nonsense. Here, everybody, give Oldy a hand tonight. A big one, folks. You all read in the papers that his yacht won the regatta up Poughkeepsie, yesterday. Give him a hand. Come, give this little boy a hand, and while you're at it give a hand to this cute little yellow gal who is going to sing you a song about the way they love 'em and leave 'em in the Oriental way. She's a nice girl, boys. Give her a hand. The cute little bow you see in the back of her kimono is her mamma's apron string. Come on, boys, give this little yaller gal a hand. She's half Chinese, and I'm for the yellow half. I'm for all races except the albinos. They've got pale blood. Oop-la! Come on now, Captain Oldfield, give this little girl a hand!"

As if Oldfield had eyes or ears or hands for anything or anyone but Rodeo.

True enough, Rodeo was a one-man show. Her eighteen girls, her two jazz orchestras in their gilt derbys, her corps of waiters were as inchoate background where Rodeo was concerned. She dominated every minute of her eight-hour working night. When her eighteen were dancing and flinging their bare little legs, Rodeo, usually mounted on a chair, guided, indeed created, the enthusiasm of her patrons, her own voice, ever raucous, rising above their frail soprano babel. She was everywhere, everybody's; she was almost all things to all men.

Sometimes Brood, watching her lead-on, lead-up, would smile with the one side of his mouth as he sat back in his dim corner, watching, checking, counting.

Shambles. White meat. . . .

And so the overheated, glittering, lucrative nights that were Rodeo's marched on, and on one of them Oldfield, even as the many who had gone before him, overstepped.

He cornered her in a small unlighted hallway, painted Moorish red, that led from the café floor to a row of small rooms where the love-em-and-leave-em's dressed. And he was not drunk.

"Rody," he said, "there's no moh gettin' away from me, chile. This cain't go on."

So then. The old story. She fastened him with her bored and insolent eye, she snapped her fingers, she did a shindig with her shoulders. She laughed with all her big white teeth.

"Go long, you. Doan' you come no nonsense with Mamie-Sue."

For once he was deaf to her banter and tried to take her, big and shimmering there in the dark, into his arms.

"If you want to give me what they call in the Persian language, 'mal de mer,' just you start that, Flossie. I'm an old woman, honey. Old enough to—to ——"

"Be my sweetie."

"Who's my sweetie? Who's my sweetie?"

"I's your sweetie, Rody."

By now, because she was backing from him in banter, they were in one of the small dressing-rooms, the pink ballet skirts of a love-em-and-leave-em seeming to kick a caper as it hung from the wall.

It was not the first time Rodeo had been backed into a chair or against a wall. Old Floss going tiresome like this! Well, it behooved Rodeo—and

when it behooved, Rodeo could endure up to the point where she was forced, as she put it, to give her number.

Here was Flossie, good for a long run of it if he would only behave; nice clean eupeptic Flossie, screamingly rich, easy at spending it, spoiling everything by forcing!

"Honey," she said, and sat down on the only chair the room boasted, "you've got me wrong. I'm just a middle-aged old girl making her bread and butter with a little of pigeon-blood, ruby and canary-diamond apple-sauce on top, if you insist. But, Flossie, you're barking up the wrong tree, honey. I'm tired. I'm willing to love 'em, but my hour for leaving 'em is sometime around sun-up, which is closing-time for Rody's little night club-cabaret."

"Why, honey-chile," said this six-foot blusterer who lived in a castle on a crag that overlooked the plains of Texas, "you're telling me something I knowed about you five minutes after I done clapped eyes on you. You're running this show from the teeth out, honey. Pep's in it, but your heart ain't."

"Now, Flossie ——"

"Shores my mammy raised me on bacon

cracklings, honey! Ain't I been a-tellin' you all these nights past I can't believe my eyes you're true."

"I'm not."

"Shore, I been cuttin' up these yeah shenani-gans because I know they was sort of expected of me, but ever since the fust night I claps eyes on you, honey, you're name's been Miss Dennis. I'm goin' to carry you off to mah castle, honey. 'Tain't in Spain, neither. It's in the finest little city in these heah United States. Honey, I'm crazy bout you."

"Mamma spank," she said, and pushed him from her with a twist of her glittering white and whitened shoulders, but there was in her eyes the look that came there when her world was too closely and too sourly with her. Too foul. . . .

"Rody, doan' you love me?"

"Sure. In your place."

"What's my place, honey?"

"I know mine without you telling me. It's here selling entertainment, off the floor. 'Tain't the place to find any other kind."

"But, honey, I want you to come with me."

"Sure you do. That's the point of argument."

"But I'm on the level, honey."

"So's my old man."

"Rody, my proposition will bowl you over."

"The fellow that can bowl me over don't reckon with this little tenpin."

"I want to marry you, Rodeo. . . ."

"Yah—when? When you get your divorce or your inheritance or your papers for Bloomingdale?"

"Now, honey, you quit not taking me serious. I want to marry you, Rodeo, and take you down home and set you up in my castle and wrap you in all the sables there is and dike you in all the diamonds there is and make you the fust lady of quality in this here land."

"Yah—and when's all this to take place?"

"And I doan' want to marry you 'some day,' neither. I want to marry you tomorrow jest as soon as two old fools like us can get ourselves a license."

She did sit back on her chair again, then. Plomp! As if somebody had pushed her.

"That's a dangerous way to kid, Floss."

"Can't you see, Rody," he said, quickly, as if putting his toe into the wedge of a door that had been closing on him, "I'm crazy about you that-away. I want to marry you right away, quick."

Tonight, honey, if there's a way. And you're not a-marrying any boob, either. You're marrying the richest man in three states, and even then, neither you nor the states know the half of it."

"If you're guying me," she said, "quit playing while the game is good-natured."

For answer he took her in his great wide spread of arms and kissed her straight and long and slow, down against her lips.

"Get me a guy, honey, with his collar on backwards, and we'll do it now. They do it in airships. Why not here?"

"You're crazy, Floss," she said, freeing herself and eyeing him slowly.

"Mebbe."

"You know what I am, don't you?"

"Mebbe. I know that you're as pure as hell's fire."

"Mebbe. But try to sell that idea to the trade."

"I know wimmin like I know horses. What I don't know about you don't hurt me, because I know everything."

"You want to take me—now get wise—me—Rodeo West—everybody's darling?"

"And no man's darling. That's why I want

you, Rodeo. 'That's me! I've always wanted what's hard to get. You're the damnedest finest woman that ever I clapped eyes on. You trying to pawn all them little underdone, milk-fed squabs off on me, when the only really woman I've seen in these parts, one with a chest to her and a look to her, sits by. I got twenty million, honey, and I swear, 'tain't enough by another twenty to offer you."

"My God!" said Rodeo, a feeling out over her which she was not sure was faintness or just silliness.

"And to show you my heart is hanging in its belfry, like I was a church tower, I'm going to your folks fust thing, the way they still do it down Alabam' way where I was raised, and say to them, if it busts me and I choke, 'Ma and Pa, I come suing for the hand of your gal.' Just like that. Heaven swat me down if I don't ——"

That was too much. Ma and Pa sitting there, Ma in the green sequins with the beet-red overlapping of flesh, and Pa with the red showing slightly beneath the sliding shirt dickey, listening to Florence, who had a mustache like one of the brothers in the cough-drop advertisement, suing for the hand of their daughter.

It was too much.

Suddenly Rodeo began to laugh in the absolutely untamable hilarity of hysteria.

In the end, though, that was precisely what happened. She was able to circumvent him that night, but next morning, which was Sunday, in fact, just after Ma had padded out her bath and was reclining, rather breathlessly, on the living-room couch in cold cream, curl papers, and a pink wadded wrapper, Mr. Florence Oldfield announced himself, presented his compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Hudler, who received him, respectively, in the pink wadded wrapper and the waistcoat that Pa Hudler had slid on over his red shirt, and sued.

Yes, sir, sued for none other than the hand of their daughter, Mamie-Sue Hudler, *alias* Rodeo West.

It was not a particularly coherent interview. But it had the saving quality of brevity; it was to the point and it left a pair of bewildered old people overwhelmed with the magnificence, the manner-born, the elegance, and the desirability of Mr. Florence Oldfield, spluttering as if they had

been two slightly damp Roman candles trying to go off.

And emboldened by the new-found dignity of having been sued for the hand of their daughter, the Hudlers took it upon themselves to exercise the unheard-of prerogative of routing out their daughter, so that, druggy with sleep, and with an irascibility that was extremely blameworthy in one whose parents had only just been sued for her hand, Rodeo appeared in trailing blue plush. This time, with blue lace cascades, her head a spectacular mane of the shorn yellowed curls, feet shushing in soft Russian boots of blue velvet topped with sable, and a necklace of square canary diamonds lending yellow eye to her irascibilities.

"Who's back shed's burning down?" she said, and took her camomile tea from Vingie so suddenly that it plopped along her arm and trickled under bracelets.

The discussion of that "back shed" occupied the Hudler family from eleven that gray Sunday until, at four o'clock, 'Sippie and Sime staggered out for air in their new Suiz Hispano roadster and Ma and Pa Hudler retired for private ecstasy.

Over and over it all again, Oldfield finally

agreeing to depart until evening, but only after Rodeo had covered her head with the flowing sleeves of the velvet negligée and screamed into it to be left alone to think. To think. To think.

To think what? It was one of those stories with two sides to it, only the two sides were on the same side: this volunteered by Sime, who looked like a young and eager auk and who was kissed soundly on the lips by 'Sippie for the sagacity of his wit.

To think what? Gaw' knows Ma and Pa Hudler felt like the good Lord had seen fit to visit upon them His wisdom and His miracle.

Rody wifing it, if not to the best of them all, then to certainly one of the best. Gawalmighty! Who was Rodeo to think twice, or to think at all over such. Gawalmighty! Ma Hudler could spank her where God meant her to sit down, for even questioning His righteousness in this visitation that was about to descend upon them.

Mamie-Sue Hudler in thirty rooms and twenty million of her own.

"Gawalmighty!" echoed the old man and drew hard on his foul-smelling pipe. "Gawal-gawalmighty!"

"Brood, for the love of Heaven, quit strumming those four G's or I'll go plum off my head."

"Rody's got nerves, Brood. Haven't you got *no* sense?"

"Sorry, 'Sippie."

"Get out, all of you! Get out and give me time to think! You hear? All of you! If only he wasn't in such a blamed hurry! I can't pack myself down there to Galveston just to suit his piping. I've got to arrange my affairs. I don't care what any of you say—I've got to have time to think. Get out!"

"Come, Pa, Rody's right upset. Naturally. Girl has got to have time to take in all that's happened to her. God's miracle working. I'm set on a church wedding."

"Get out!"

"Come, Pa. Come, Ma."

"Not you! Stay where you are Brood, if it makes you feel any better. It's just those damn four G's get on my nerves. If you can stand that piano stool all day, I guess I ought to be able to stand having you there. Did you hear what I said? I don't want to hear those four G's."

"Lay off that tantrum business, Rodeo. Those four G's won't bite."

"They've already bit my nerves in two."

"Sorry."

Silence.

"Well?"

Silence.

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"Now that we're alone, what's your honest-to-goodness on it all, Brood? Like a fairy tale, isn't it? Like one of the spoofing ones you would expect a man to write who believes in the wrong kind of fairies."

"What do I know about your business?"

"Nothing except pretty nearly everything there is to know."

"I mean your private business."

"Haven't any."

"This. This. This, damn it, is!"

"Change your manner, Brood. It gets my goat."

"Sorry."

"Quit saying that—or I'll scream."

He swung around on the stool, nursing his knee with his left arm, his face tilted and his eyes squinted.

"My opinion don't make a hell of a lot of

difference around here, and I don't recall that it's been asked for up to this minute."

"You knew it would be—sooner or later."

"Well, what if I haven't got any?"

"Would be the first time you didn't have."

"Come now, let's play nice, Rody."

"Play nice with you? Can't be done when you get the devil in you."

"Then don't try."

"Wouldn't if I had an ounce of sense."

"You have, though. You've got two ounces."

"Compliment, I take it?"

"Yes, if you take it."

"I've got as much right, Brood, as the next, to be a married woman with the things in life that make life worth living to a woman if she's a normal one. Nothing to hold me back. Not even a past."

"Right enough."

"That the way you feel about it?"

"You'd be a fool to let the opportunity slip."

"I'm wise to myself, Brood. He is, too, for that matter. I'm not getting any younger. I wear all right under calcimine, but ten years from now what am I but a floozy old hen that's had enough sense to save herself a nest egg?"

"No use lying to yourself on that, Rode. Right again."

"I'm wise to myself, Brood. I've got the name. I'm supposed to have the game."

"You are."

"I've had a run-in on the accident of this prohibition business such as falls to few girls in my business. And I've had the sense to go while the going is good. But outside of the nest egg, where's it got me? Broadway's hostess."

"Broadway's hostess."

"Being hostess to Broadway is like being a chameleon trying to change color on a Scotchman's plaid kiltie. Five years from now, Broadway's young ones will be asking whether 'Rodeo West' was a side show or a gin fizz?"

"Right."

"Pa and Ma and 'Sippie aren't all wrong. It's a miracle, Brood. A certified boy friend with his castle in Spain, a real one in Galveston, wants to marry me in any little old church around any little corner that suits me. Me, hostess to Broadway after eleven P.M."

"Your worst enemy would have to admit you would be crazy not to."

"There's only one thing, Brood, in the way."

"Well, whatever it is, forget it."

"Can't."

"Do it, anyhow."

"Can't."

"Can't is a dumb-bell's word. Whatever you are, you are not that."

"I don't love him—Brood."

"Well, learn to."

"Can't."

"You can, and it's up to you to do it!"

With a yell then, that sprang somewhere from the primordial depths of her, Rodeo did something of which she had no momentary knowledge and over which she had no momentary control. She snatched up a book-end of a bronze warrior off the table, and for an incredible moment stood with it aimed straight for the hunched figure on the piano stool.

"Damn you!" she cried. "Damn you! Damn you! Damn you!" And then, with the handful of unwieldy book-end crushed to her shuddering lips, half sank to the floor and against her chair. "What are you made of? What is that piece of something in you supposed to be a heart? Don't it beat? Don't it ache? Don't it torture you as mine has me since the day I clapped eyes on you?"

Don't it do nothing? What's it made of? Who hung it inside of you? God or devil? It's made out of stone, that heart of yours is, and it's crushing me. . . ."

The figure of Brood seated on the piano stool seemed to curl inward. The fingers, the feet drawing upward, the lips receding.

"You're not human, Brood. You're a stone-crusher. You're iron and you roll over human beings like they were so much gravel. That's me. I'm the gravel. Don't you love no one, Brood? Don't you need no one? Don't you care about no one on God's earth? Who are you? What are you? What—what—what—?"

It was unbelievable. Here was a woman in the naked throes of a horrible kind of loss of self-control, and as she talked, as she choked, as she sobbed, it was as if the figure on the piano stool, drawing closer and closer into itself, was shaping into some sort of tornado, gathering velocity to descend. When it did, its right arm shot out, quick and short and curved like a talon.

"What am I made of? Want to know? Want to know? I'm made out of love for you, that's what I'm made of, and it's turned my heart to gall! The secretness of it—the years—the years

of hell of seeing you—my property—everybody's property! That's what I'm made of! The bitterness of that! Love for you! What am I here? A glorified head waiter. A taker of your orders. A hanger-on. A parasite. And why? Why, I ask you? Do I look like a man content with that? Why? Why have I held out? So I could be near you. Your door mat. Your footstool. And now you—you dare to ask me what I am made of ——"

"Broody," she said in a whisper and sat back on her heels and crushed her hands over her mouth and regarded him with enormous eyes.

"Where did I come from? Bah! You never even took the trouble to care—or ask ——"

"I—didn't dare ——"

"You didn't care, you mean. Just took me for one more hanger-on."

"I—never—did ——"

"Well? Well? If you know, tell me! Where did I come from? Damn—where did I come from?"

"Broody, I don't know—I never dared ask—you."

"Of course you don't know. I'll tell you where I came from. I came to you in Fresno from

months of skulking around the edge of places where you used to sing in gulch towns, you never clapping eyes on me, but me crazy for you on sight. You never even troubled to ask ——”

“Oh, my God ——!”

“You’ve been too busy wiping up the world with your ermine tails!”

“No—no—no ——”

“But I’ve got you,” he cried, and clapped himself against his shirt front with the fierce, short laugh. “I’ve got you, only you don’t know it. I’ve got you closer to me than any tony turfman is ever going to have you in his castle. You hear me? Ask me why? Ask me why?” he cried, and showed his teeth that were suddenly a dancing streak across his face.

“Why?” she gasped because he hovered over her like the impending tornado and his fingers which were like talons stirred the edges of her hair.

“Why—Brood?”

“I’ll tell you why! I’ll tell you why!”

“Brood, for God’s sake, don’t shout out that way!”

“Because I’ve got you in here! In my shoulder. Didn’t know that, did you? Something that was intended for you, fifteen years ago in a dance hall

in Sacramento. A bullet from a crazy ranchman's .36. I got it, pushing myself up against you in the dark when I felt it aiming straight for you. I got it, and a nip of your left ear. A piece of you! Here in my shoulder. You can't take that away from me, can you!"

"Broody—Broody—Broody ——"

"What the devil do I care that it ruined my violin arm! I've got you in it. You can't get out. The bullet that was meant for your flesh lodged in mine. You hear me? You're in the prison of me and you can't get out. And then you ask me what am I made of. I'm made of you! You! As if you know anything about this thing inside called the human heart. That's how I've loved. That's how I'll go on loving. You get yourself into that tony castle, but get yourself out of this left wing of mine if you can. No—No—Rodeo for God's sake—no ——"

"Broody—why, Broody—why, hello, life—I'm just this minute born ——"

The beating of their bodies seemed to dash them apart no sooner they had found the sudden, the terrible ecstasy of clinging. His face, the rugged, tormented face that her hands could not seem to leave go, was against the white of her throat, and

yet it seemed to her that down the stream of her tears it was floating away from her.

"Let me go, Rodeo!"

"I can't let you go. I'll never let you go. I'm famished for this. I'm starved. For years, the only prayer I've known—has been for this. Brood take me. Kill me. Torment me. Only keep me. I've never been happy before. So help me God, never one single hour. Never let me go, Brood. I want to kiss your eyelids awake. I want to kiss them asleep. Give this little girl a hand, Brood?"

"No, no, Rodeo ——"

"Too busy wiping up the world with ermine tails? Me? Oh, my hurt beautiful boy with the hurt, beautiful face! Too busy! Why, all these years I've been yelling my heart out every night, to cover up the heartache. I've been whistling in the dark. That's been my success!"

"The wasted years. . . ."

"Not wasted, Brood. I'll make them up to you."

"The wasted bitterness." . . .

"I'll sweeten your heart for you."

"Closer, Rody. You don't mind the broken

wing? I'll be such a lover to you, Rodeo. We'll touch perfection."

"Yes, yes, yes! Bless the broken wing! Bless it! Bless it!"

"Rodeo, Rodeo, I'm mad. We mustn't ——"

"Brood, you can't ever now turn me off."

"I'm a nothing. You've a decent man to care for you."

"Don't remind me of it. How low I was! How wretched! I never could have gone through with it—that was what must have driven me crazy, Brood—I never could have had the courage, if your silence—your terrible silence—hadn't driven me crazy."

"All the while you were telling me about it, Rodeo—the thought came to me like a knife—I'll kill her. I'll kill her with the words on her lips—that's what was happening to me. But I wouldn't have, Rody—I always knew, come what might, that I had you—here—inside ——"

"You're light. You're life itself. What I have been on the brink of doing shows you how I need you. Give this little girl a hand, Brood."

"Rodeo! Rodeo!"

"I can't let you go. Ever."

"Rodeo, I can't believe it. That you too have

been so terribly alone—all these years. You glittered so.”

“Don’t make me try to say it in words, Brood—how terribly alone I have been; the words hurt my lips. If only you had shown some sign.”

“You’ll never be sorry, Rody——”

“Yes, for one thing. For the years we have missed.”

“Rodeo, can you feel my heart with your heart?”

“Yes, Brood. It’s the silliest wish—but I want to crawl in to where the bullet is—it would somehow seem closer—Brood—Brood——”

His eyes, new, bold, burning eyes, seemed to scour and scour her.

“Aren’t you afraid, Rodeo, sweet beautiful, aren’t you afraid of being loved the way I shall love you, terribly—fiercely—unrelentingly?”

“Yes, I am afraid, I am afraid. Only, I am more afraid of not being loved always—terribly—fiercely and unrelentingly, by you.”

